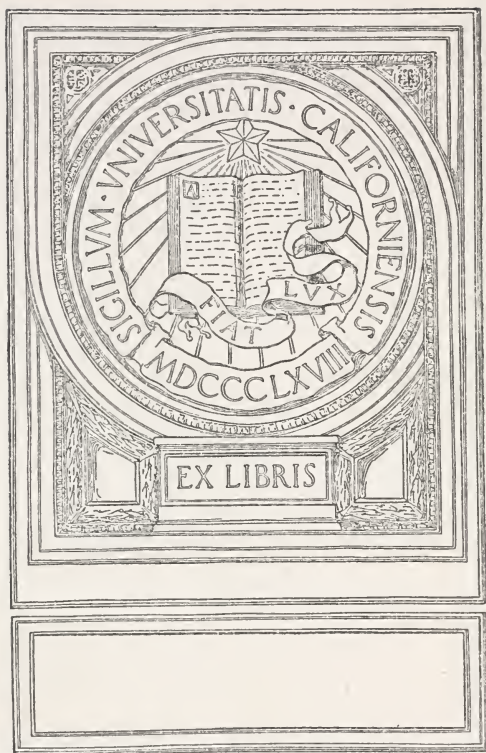


Clemencia's Crisis

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Edith
Ogden
Harrison

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CLEMENCIA'S CRISIS



Far out the waters dissolved from blue into wondrous
shades of green [Page 3]



Clemencia's Crisis

BY

Edith Ogden Harrison

Author of

"The Lady of the Snows," "Princess Sayrane,"

"Prince Silverwings," etc.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY

FRED J. ARTING

CHICAGO

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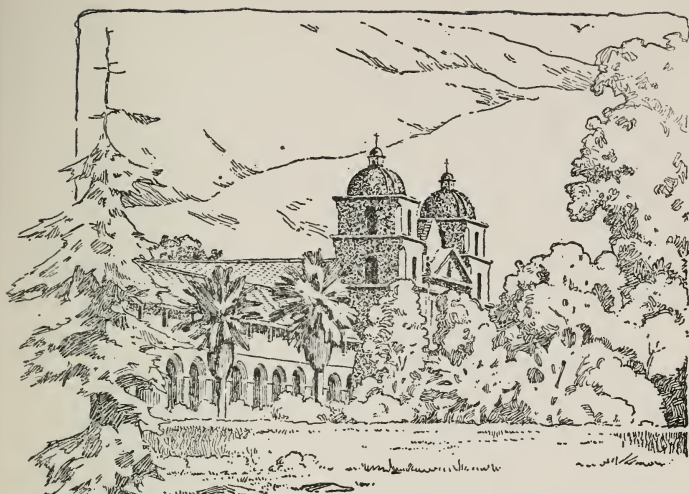
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To My Friends

*In that Wonderful Land of Sunshine and
Flowers and Hospitality—*

California



CHAPTER I

ONE glorious February morning a young man stood on the summit of a beautiful pass in the San Rafael Mountains. He belonged to a type which would have attracted attention anywhere, but alone, in that splendid setting, into which he seemed to fit so well, he was especially worth observation.

Tall and well built, his cumbersome knapsack, which might have appeared unwieldy on another man, seemed but to contribute

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grace. The olive tint of his face showed intimate acquaintance with nature. His deep-set eyes, now gray, now steel blue, looked steadily ahead. His clean-shaven jaw showed great strength of purpose and evidence that the will of its possessor once aroused would dominate to the end. The humorous mouth softened a bit the almost sinister sternness of the face, and when the latter relaxed into smiles it seldom failed to win a friend.

Here unquestionably was a handsome man, and, as his record showed, a brave one. Before he was twenty Lieutenant Arslan Barrington had won his spurs in active service, and under Dewey sailed quickly and fearlessly into the hearts of the American people.

He had accompanied our now famous admiral on the dark night when in Manila Bay he had carried his ship stanchly into the enemy's midst, while they slept, winning fame for himself and glorifying a nation.

But that victory was not the only one in which Lieutenant Barrington had shared. Every line of his splendid figure showed that he was born to fight and, although when he was deeply moved his quivering nostrils and his glowing face indicated

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a somewhat sensitive nature, one never mistook the strength revealed in his countenance.

Standing now with cap in hand he watched the blue waters of the Pacific — that ocean so rare in its beauty, so unforgettable in its splendor. The waves, tipped with sunshine, flashed fire, while the air above quivered with luminous rays. Far out the waters dissolved from blue into wondrous shades of green, and across the rainbow colors misty, mysterious islands reared their heads, glinting like jewels in a turquoise setting.

Dropping his gaze to the land below him the young officer tried to make out the Franciscan mission of Santa Barbara, for that was his destination. The admiral of the Pacific squadron at San Diego had, a few days previously, intrusted him with special dispatches to be carried there.

And then an announcement from the President of the United States was flashed around the world! From the Atlantic to the Pacific, from East to West, the wires tingled with its importance. From the smallest adobe in the foothills of the Sierras to the palaces on the Hudson the interest vibrated. The American fleet would sail around the globe!

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Lieutenant Barrington had undertaken the journey to Santa Barbara with delight, especially as he had sufficient time to allow of his walking over the Casitas Pass. In no better way could he travel that sunlit California than with a map and compass. The trails were not always clear, but he never minded a detour, for it invariably revealed some unexpected beauty. The graceful grouping of the mountains, the surprises of canyons and dividing ridges, all so supremely lovely that it is impossible to overestimate their charm, were indescribable.

And color! That wonderful paint brush which nature alone can wield! One minute the mountains are gold and dazzling, then a passing cloud seems to steal the miser's heap and they suddenly become deep blue or steel or purple. Perhaps one white as silver looms up against a rosy-colored sky. Sometimes a bird flutters from the branches of a silver fir and sings a melody of spring. But always from the storm-beaten fringes of their icy peaks to the lowest regions of meadow, bright with flowers, the mountains are magnificent.

With his field-glasses Barrington at last spied the mission — beautiful enough to attract atten-

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tion, even did one know naught of its interesting history. Built on the crest of a hill commanding a view of the valley, its twin towers are boldly outlined against the higher range.

The young man descended the pass rapidly and came out in an open stretch of valley. He had almost finished his journey. The mountains had been cool, but here in the valley the day had become suddenly very warm and he felt his energy wane.

It was high noon. He would find shelter, eat his modest lunch, sleep away the heated hours of the afternoon and reach the mission in time for supper. He threw himself down under the shade of a great pepper tree and sank to sleep almost as soon as his head touched the ground.

CHAPTER II

HOW long he had been asleep he did not know, but it must have been several hours, for when he opened his eyes again the sun was setting low and he awakened suddenly as if something had disturbed him. He sat up and leaned against the trunk of the pepper tree and as he did so he realized what it was that had broken in upon his rest.

Three women were approaching and from their attire he judged they were nuns. He arose and stood waiting for them to come near him.

Two of the women were old, but the third, from a certain easy undulation in her walk, he knew was young. Their heavy full-skirted brown dresses were looped up on one hip and together with their flat shoes retarded their movements. But in spite of this, the elastic step of the woman in the center betrayed unmistakably her youthful vigor. They were conversing earnestly.

The young woman appeared to be protesting

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vigorously and her excitement was in great contrast to the calmness of the others. All three were too engrossed to notice him, although they were so near now that he caught a part of their conversation.

He decided to make his presence known, but quickly changed his mind and drew back beneath the branches of the tree. For a strange thing was happening. The nuns had stopped. The two older ones faced him, and, lifting their hands, began praying aloud. The third sank on her knees before them, her face in her hands. He could not understand what they said, but at last the words, "Heaven give peace to our afflicted sister," fell on his ears. Then, ceasing, they kissed her on the forehead, chin, and either cheek, in this manner making a cross. When she had risen to her feet they kissed her cheek again and after saying aloud, "Beloved, good-bye," they turned and walked away quickly.

The young nun remained immovable until they had disappeared. When the last flutter of their brown garments had faded in the distance she raised her hands deliberately and took off her cap and veil. Then gradually she loosened her hair.

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It fell in a long yellow stream far below her waist. Suddenly she shook her head and the golden shower floated from her in waves of light, falling almost to her knees. The man who watched her wondered that one woman could possess so much. It waved, it rippled, it shimmered in the sunshine. He had never dreamed anything so glorious as this woman's loosened hair. It was bewildering. It thrilled him. Then the reflection that the possessor of this golden mass was utterly unconscious of his presence gave him a tingling sensation of guilt.

Overhead in the rich blue of the sky masses of foamy white clouds were floating. In the feathery branches of the pepper tree the red berries flaunted their vivid scarlet beauty, but of all the brilliant color the man saw nothing but the shower of dazzling gold. He had had no view at all of the woman's face. Indeed, with this glinting veil and the brilliant sunlight which fell over her head and body he could scarcely distinguish her form.

Suddenly she gave a great cry and stretching her arms out wildly threw herself upon the ground and broke into piteous weeping. Sobs shook her

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slender form from head to foot. She quivered with a grief so violent he wondered what could be the tragedy which it expressed.

He began to feel most uncomfortable. It seemed almost criminal to watch this woman who, believing herself to be alone, was giving away to her sorrow. Still, he could not leave any human creature suffering as she evidently was without offering assistance.

Impulsively he took a step forward. She heard his footsteps and sat up instantly, at the same time drawing her hair more thickly across her face, concealing it entirely. When he reached her side she had ceased to sob. Only a long quivering movement of her body showed her agitation.

As he stood before her he never felt more awkward in his life, yet he felt that he must say something, and after the manner of man he asked the first question which came into his mind.

“ Can you show me the Camino del Rey? ”

She started to rise, but her paroxysm of grief had weakened her and she staggered. Impulsively he caught her hands to aid her to her feet. Only an instant he held them because she withdrew them at once, but though her face was still con-



“ El Camino del Rey ”

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cealed behind the golden veil he said instinctively to himself:

"I am sure that she is beautiful. Her hands have told me so."

He had caught only a fleeting glance at them, it is true, as they lay for an instant in his own, but that glance had revealed that they were slender, white, and the pink palms and pinker nails showed refinement and culture. She was no ordinary nun living by daily routine and drudgery; of that he was convinced.

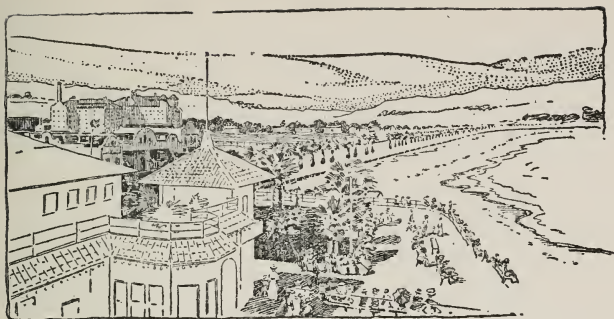
When she spoke he would learn more from her voice. But she did not speak, and her manner compelled him also to silence. There was aloofness even in her way of answering his question, for she merely raised the brown-shrouded arm and pointed silently to the way he should follow. Then before he could thank her for even this silent courtesy she turned and walked swiftly in the opposite direction until she disappeared into the valley.

As he took his way down the road to which she had pointed, although he had not even seen her face or obtained the slightest clew to her name he told himself calmly:

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"I know I shall see that woman again. Strange, even ridiculous as it may seem, I was never more convinced of anything in my life. Something passed between us when I touched her hands and although no words were uttered, it seemed as if our souls spoke together."





CHAPTER III

ALL around Barrington the cypress and the myrtle bloomed. Birds in scarlet plumage flickered like flame between the branches of the green trees as he passed by groves where golden oranges dangled temptingly.

He was in the most fascinating highway in all the world — the Camino del Rey, which, like a broad ribbon, stretches through California and which once connected the missions and linked the settlements built by the Spaniards and the Indians. What wonderful tales could be written of it — tales of the splendid heroism of the padres, without whose mighty efforts California could not have lived in those early days when, happily or wearily,

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those sainted priests tramped that broad highway.

Inspired by these thoughts Barrington strode along toward Santa Barbara. Just outside of the town a sudden turn in the road brought him in full view of a man and woman. Both were Spaniards. The woman was refined in appearance, astonishingly pretty and apparently in the early twenties. The man bore the ear-marks of an aristocrat, yet he was of a distinctly disagreeable type. Unlike most of his race, he was tall, and, though unusually handsome, his face showed the weakness of self-indulgence and deep lines of dissipation. Furthermore, it was now convulsed with anger.

The couple had evidently just left their horses, for the woman wore the California riding dress with its divided skirt, while the costume of the man was accentuated to picturesqueness by the sombrero and high-top boots. They were too absorbed in their quarrel to notice Barrington's approach. The man was older than his companion. Barrington judged him to be about thirty-five. The woman was talking rapidly in her native tongue, which Barrington understood perfectly. She was

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reproaching her companion, and it evidently angered him greatly, for suddenly he seized her by the shoulders and shook her.

To the officer's astonishment the girl showed no resentment. She did not even struggle. But her submissiveness instead of softening apparently only angered him all the more. He raised his whip and undoubtedly would have struck her had not Barrington, unable to contain his indignation longer, sprung forward.

At the sight of him the astonished Spaniard dropped the girl's arm and exclaimed in fury:

"Where in the devil's name did you come from?"

Ignoring his question and making no effort to veil his contempt Barrington asked:

"What kind of man are you to strike a woman?"

"Must I account to you, sir?" replied the Spaniard haughtily. "I may do as I like. The woman is mine."

"But humanity is the world's," came the quick retort, "and real men do not strike their wives."

The Spaniard's angry flush heightened as the two men faced each other.

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"And pray, sir, who are you that you should dictate the proper treatment of wives?"

"Only a man," answered the other.

The girl had drawn off a little to one side and was quietly weeping. She showed no interest whatever in the altercation.

"Well," continued the Spaniard, advancing a step nearer, "and what will humanity and your damned impertinence choose to do now as against my property, sir?"

His insolence and the sneer which accompanied it was too much of a strain upon the American's patience. Barrington suddenly sprang forward, and when a few minutes later, scowling and cursing with anger, the Spaniard picked himself up with a blackened eye and a sprained wrist, he was doubtless convinced that it was a mistake to fight a man without first wisely judging his strength and skill.

Barrington felt considerably better. He had not enjoyed bandying words with the man.

"I shall be here for some time," he volunteered, "and can be found at the mission. I shall be glad at any time to discuss the law with you again, on the same terms."

CHAPTER IV

AN hour or so later Barrington sat in the reception hall of the mission awaiting the Superior. The door opened softly and a monk entered in silence, who folded his two hands over the one which the young officer proffered as though he was too much moved to speak. The padre was above the average height, but his figure looked even taller because he was very thin. The thick folds of his brown woolen habit fell together as though they covered a shadow. He wore a broad leather girdle and from his side hung a rosary of wooden beads ending in a cross cut of ivory. His face and figure might have belonged to a hermit of Egypt, but he bore the unmistakable mark of his country. Skin, hair, and eyes showed him to be a Spaniard. His features were regular and pleasing.

“What a handsome man Padre Galvez must have been in his youth,” thought Barrington.

The old priest's dark eyes, bright and piercing,

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softened wonderfully as he looked at the young man before him and a gentle smile illumined his face when he said in a voice of fullness and sweetness:

"You are astonishingly like your mother — like her as I knew her in her youth. She must be gray-haired now, but she will always be beautiful," he finished gently, "for her soul was beautiful."

At the priest's words one of his rare smiles broke over the young officer's face.

"My mother, sir, is, as you say, very beautiful still."

They were standing, the elder man still holding the hand of the younger one. For a moment Padre Galvez's thoughts were back to the past and he had a vision of the young Irish girl as he had seen her once in the rosy freshness of her twenty years. But he returned instantly to the present. He realized that her son was there before him and was perhaps thinking him wanting in hospitality. He therefore courteously bade him to supper, after which they talked long and earnestly of the matters concerned with Barrington's mission, and the padre asked many questions pertaining to worldly matters.

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Man of the world that he was, Barrington wondered more than once how a solitary priest, living among inscriptions and carvings, had gathered so great a knowledge of current events. He would not have thought it possible.

When the officer rose to leave he had a strong desire to question the padre concerning the cloistered nuns near by and to tell him of his experience with the novice that afternoon. But it seemed like spying further upon the unfortunate woman and so he held his peace. He felt, however, that there was one question which he must ask this learned man.

"Padre," he ventured, "have you in your faith only condemnation for the psychic?"

"My son, why should the faith condemn?"

"But could you as a priest accept something not clearly explained? Would it not be wrong?"

"Not always. Circumstances would have much weight; but your question is a little vague."

The young man reddened. He dared not be more explicit.

"If you were absolutely convinced of something which reason told you was impossible, padre, would you still believe?"

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"The mysteries of the world are many," the priest responded. "Wiser heads than ours have puzzled over them."

There came to Barrington the thought of an episode in his memorable campaign with Dewey which was fraught with mystery at the time, but which later had made him more or less a firm believer in the occult.

"May I tell you of my first experience with the psychic?" he asked.

The priest nodded acquiescence.

"On the morning that the *Olympia* stole through the gray mist into the waters of Manila Bay I was stationed aft on the lower deck, while our famous commander and his immediate subordinates occupied the bridge."

The young man flushed as he observed a tightening of the lips of the man to whom he was speaking. He felt instantly the inappropriateness of the subject before such a listener, for while Padre Galvez was a man of big mental caliber, the thought of that memorable morning in which his nation's ships had been humbled in a most incredibly brief affray could not but affect him now. The priest saw the young man's embar-

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rassment and with kindness of heart came speedily to his rescue.

"Go on, my boy; we cannot quarrel with history. You started to tell me something about the day of which you were justly proud and of which we have no reason to be ashamed. Go on."

"I *felt* rather than heard a voice," continued Barrington. "It was insistent, and in what was probably not more than the passing of a few seconds it seemed to repeat its command a dozen times. Involuntarily I heeded it without attempting to define it. I stepped a pace to the right and as I did so a ball from one of the Spanish ships tore into and pierced the main hatchway behind which I had stood.

"The miraculous escape did not impress me greatly at the time. I attributed it to luck."

The young officer leaned forward and his ordinarily cold eyes sparkled as he went on.

"The real significance of the incident, padre, came home to me after my return to America. My mother and I were in the library of our New York home. It was late at night, for I had been narrating to her at length the history of the prodigious day that made our admiral famous. Of a

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sudden she arose, and, walking to my side, put her arms around me. 'My boy,' she said, 'you don't know what a joy it is for me to see you safely here by my side. I always worry about you when you are gone, of course. But this last time I was more uneasy than ever before. Do you know, Arslan, that in the very hour, perhaps the very moment, when you were in the thick of that engagement on the *Olympia* I seemed to receive some telepathic message that you were in imminent danger. I was agonized and in my excitement cried aloud, "Move, Arslan, move!" I wonder if you heard me — if a kind Providence made you hear me?'

"You can imagine, padre, my feelings when the thought of that strange warning I had received on the battleship was recalled by my mother's words. I am now a firm believer in mental telepathy. Can you blame me?"

"No," answered Padre Galvez kindly. "The ways of Providence are impenetrable. And now — now in a different way you are experiencing another mystery?"

Again the young man's face flushed, but he did not reply. Perhaps this new psychic feeling could be explained the same way.

CHAPTER V

BARRINGTON was thoughtful as he bade the padre good night. Later in his room he found himself depressed. Yet he was on the alert as though bracing himself to meet some great pressure.

He was not an emotional man, and he had lived a rational and rather quiet life. He was a book lover and a fisherman, two occupations conducive to an easy conscience, for a life in the open air is really a university course for the soul. Even at this moment of highest nerve tension he was saying to himself with a clear, normal brain: "This can all be explained. Some day the theories of Mesmer and Charcot will seem simple and the miracles they performed will be explained."

It had been but a moment that he had held the woman's hands, but the knowledge of her call had come to him instantaneously. His own soul had answered affirmatively as it thrilled in the grip of her appeal.



Barrington bade the padre good night

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The mere remembrance of it filled his mind and a dozen times he tried to force his thoughts into other channels, but try as he would he was unsuccessful. Over and over again he asked himself:

“Can I believe? Can any sane man believe?”

Suddenly he heard a voice say:

“Open your eyes and believe.”

It seemed to Barrington that he had made a great effort to obey and that when he opened his eyes he was in a strange room, evidently a library, for he saw bookcases and a writing table. Through the open windows he could see the blue waves of the ocean and the scent of heliotrope with the perfume of other flowers came to him. The voice which had bidden him open his eyes spoke again. It was a musical, woman's voice.

“Do not struggle to see anyone but me,” it said. “It is not necessary that you should see anyone else yet. But please look at me. I am waiting.”

He turned in the direction of the voice and saw a young woman. She was tall, with dark glowing eyes and golden hair. Save for the fact, however, that the color of her hair was unusual she was of the strictly Spanish type.

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He gazed upon her without speaking, startled by her beauty, it is true, but even more startled by the troubled look in her eyes. In them was a piteous appeal which touched him profoundly. Her voice, though low, was very distinct and she was speaking directly to him.

"I am very unhappy," she said. "Will you help me?"

"I will do all that I can," he replied impulsively, surprised at his own earnestness.

"But if you really mean to help me you must fight."

"I am not a coward, Senorita. Believe me, I will fight for you with all my soul."

It seemed to him a little strange that they should be speaking Spanish.

She smiled, showing milk-white teeth, but as he leaned forward to take her hand she moved back a step.

"Not yet," she said. "There is plenty of time to meet me in the flesh. I wanted only to be sure that you would help me and so I came in spirit."

She kept moving farther and farther away as she spoke. Fearing lest she should leave the room, he said eagerly:

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" But tell me, how can I help you? I do not know what trouble you are in. I do not even know your name! "

" Alas! " she said sadly, her hand on the door, " that *you* must find out for yourself. I have no power to say more. Good-bye."

He sprang forward, but in an instant the woman disappeared and he found himself sitting up in his chair holding tightly to a spray of heliotrope which he had pulled from a vase standing on the table by his side.

It was still a long time till dawn. He was healthy, young, and tired. So darkening the room he went to bed and was soon asleep.

CHAPTER VI

THE next afternoon, when Lieutenant Barrington met Padre Galvez at the appointed hour, the priest greeted him warmly.

“The Senora Castellanos has consented to entertain the fleet when it arrives in Santa Barbara,” he said. “Manuel Sanchez has just brought me the message. He is her cousin and the manager of her estate. His influence is great with her.

“With the senora’s consent I am satisfied the welcome of the few Spanish people here will be no small part of the great preparations.”

“I am glad,” responded Barrington, “because although the Spaniards are few in number the President especially desired them to be prominent in the festivities.”

“I am glad, too, my son, glad also that many weeks must yet elapse before the arrival of the fleet. It will give me time to become acquainted with you after all these years of separation from your parents. But I must not be selfish. Your

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letters to our leading people here must not be forgotten. While you present the one to Mr. Grigsby Helton this afternoon I will make arrangements to call with you another day upon Senora Castellanos."

"Padre," said the young man, "tell me something of the ranch life. What is its attraction for people of culture?"

"That is easily seen, my son. Take these beautiful homes, almost in the mountains and yet in sight of the Pacific, fill them with people of wealth and refinement and there you have the basis of California ranch life."

"Whose is the white palace on the summit of the hill?"

"It is occupied by a beautiful woman in the English Court set. But it is no more popular than the small one hidden a few miles distant, the home of the widow of a famed writer."

"Intellectuality should govern wherever it rests, of course, but how seldom it does," said Barrington, musingly.

"My son, do not judge all the representatives of prosperity by the disgusting vulgarity of some."

"I assure you, padre, that I have no desire to

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disparage them," the officer answered, " but you must admit that our wealthiest Americans are not always those of whom we are most proud."

" Ah," eagerly interposed the priest, " admitting this, there are still many whose power has been given by money whose lives are simple and wholesome — many who, though not blind to the advantages of wealth, take them like sane, healthy mortals. For such as these surely our country has only a feeling of pride."

" And are your Santa Barbarans sane mortals, such as you describe? " laughed the young man.

" Many of them are, indeed. Santa Barbara claims its life of pleasure, and perpetual self-indulgence is bound to lower our moral standard and weaken the race, of course. But there are noble types of men and women here."

And later Barrington thought the Grigsby Heltons should be included in the best type of Santa Barbarans. Mr. Helton was president of one of the greatest railroads in the West, a mighty artery connecting the two oceans. He was only forty, but already his splendid executive ability had tended considerably toward his road's success.

It was in this railroad magnate's beautiful Santa

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Barbara home that Barrington made his entree to California society. Mrs. Helton was twenty-eight, in the flush of youth and very popular. It was natural, therefore, that their house should be a social center.



CHAPTER VII

TWO days later at four in the afternoon Lieutenant Barrington in response to an invitation called upon Mrs. Helton. He found her a charming woman, and when they had spent a few minutes in conversation she arose saying:

“I must not be utterly selfish, Lieutenant Barrington. I have other guests who desire to meet you. We will go to the library, where tea will be served.”

They crossed a spacious hall filled with wonderful potted plants and entered the library.

It was well that Mrs. Helton was leading, else she might have been surprised at the young officer's face. When they entered the room he paled visibly. It took all his self-control to prevent his exclaiming aloud.

The room he had entered was the room of his dream!

The bookcases, table, and chairs were just as he had observed them in his vision. The sun

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streaming through the open window, the blue ocean in the distance, the strong scent of the delicious heliotrope — all were exactly as he had known them.

He pulled himself together only by a powerful effort. He felt that he must control his facial expression, that he must not betray his emotions. He was as certain, though, that he would see the girl of his dream as he was that he was following Mrs. Helton and the thought actually made him afraid to lift his eyes.

Then Barrington was conscious that Mrs. Helton was introducing him, that some young ladies bowed and addressed him cordially and that he murmured some greetings in reply. Finally he gained sufficient courage to look about him. He noticed that none of the young women to whom he had been presented bore any resemblance whatever to his dream maiden and this fact gave him time to collect himself. Feeling less nervous he boldly scanned the room.

And then he saw her.

He never quite forgot the thrill of that moment. Indeed, it seemed to him that he never afterward forgot the slightest thing in connection with her.

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She was standing in a group of young people and was easily distinguishable from the rest. It may have been the peculiar combination of dark eyes and light hair. It may have been the unusual haughtiness of her carriage. It may have been her beautiful face. But whatever it was he knew from the first glance that the Spanish girl had come into his life now and forever.

Following his glance his hostess said warmly:

"That is Clemencia Castellanos, my best friend. I shall take great pleasure in presenting you. But let me warn you in advance. She is a veritable enchantress and you must not succumb to her charms."

He laughed pleasantly, but did not reply. His hostess lowered her voice and whispered:

"Really, I am in earnest, Lieutenant Barrington. It would be hopeless, you know, for she is already promised."

Somewhat at a loss as to what to say in reply to this strange confidence Barrington answered lightly:

"She is young. She cannot have been promised very long."

"She was promised in childhood."

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"Forbidden fruit," he jested, "is always the choicest. Then, too, I have heard of broken promises."

"True. But your arts would be useless here. Her smiles would never be for you. She is bound as securely as though a chain of our glittering Sierras held her hidden in their midst."

"Are the Spaniards so tenacious of their promises?"

"This one would die before she would break hers."

"But, Madame," he protested, "you are making me curious about your beautiful Spanish siren. In fact, I am so interested that I cannot promise not to enter the lists as a valiant suitor for her smiles."

"Then your fate be on your head," she laughed.

Suddenly, however, her face grew grave and she added:

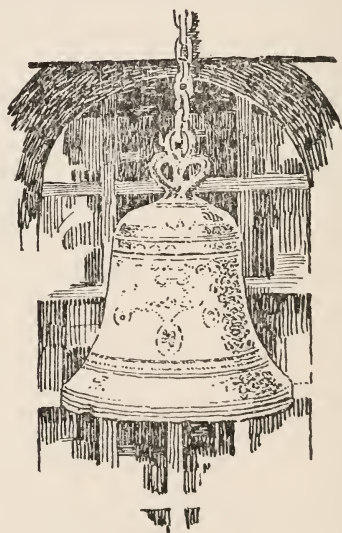
"If I thought you were serious I would not present you. The girl is beautiful as an angel, but she is really promised. Her word will never be retracted. Never. *Never.*"

For a moment he felt quite thrilled by the

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solemnity of her words, but recovering his poise he murmured under his breath:

“ Lucky the man who has won such devotion.”
Then aloud: “ Lead on, I am ready to face
your enchantress! ”





CHAPTER VIII

AND so Arslan Barrington stood before the beautiful girl of his dream, finding her even more entrancing in life. Her lips and skin were luminous. Her figure was superb. She bore herself with an indescribable stateliness which was charming in one so young.

Mrs. Helton left them alone after she had presented the young officer and for a moment neither spoke. Then Barrington, bowing ceremoniously, said:

“ Senorita, may I have the pleasure of drinking tea with you? ”

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"Certainly, Lieutenant Barrington. Are you not the guest of honor?"

He smiled down on her. She had promptly dealt his vanity a blow. But he answered lightly:

"Would you imply, then, that politeness alone impels you to accept my invitation?"

"Would you have me acknowledge more on a moment's acquaintance?" came the quick retort.

"Senorita, I throw myself upon your mercy. I refuse to enter into a combat of words with one so eminently skilled in their use."

"You seem quite able to defend yourself," she laughed.

"But why should you assure me that you are not free to refuse my request?" he jested.

"Why should I flatter you by saying anything else?"

"Senorita Castellanos, again I sue for mercy. Should we fight now I feel sure that I would go down in defeat. Therefore I shall bring your tea at once."

She laughed heartily. "An officer!" she mocked, "and so lacking in courage!"

"I shall hope to regain mine over the tea cups," he said.

Clemencia's Crisis

All the time they had been talking, although they had both spoken lightly, there had been a subtle something in the girl's manner which savored of embarrassment.

But at his last words she laughed again and seemed to lose the indefinable something. Thereafter she appeared more natural. She motioned to a corner of the room, saying:

"I shall wait for you there. Lemon and one lump of sugar, please."

"Miss Castellanos," he said, approaching and handing her the cup, "I am to call at your home tomorrow and meet your grandmother. I consider it a great honor that she has consented to receive me."

To his astonishment a most peculiar expression crossed her face — one which he could not analyze. Had he said something to displease her? And if so, what was it?

"Yes," she replied. "I was surprised to learn that she had consented to entertain the fleet at your request."

"You do me too much honor, *Senorita*. The request comes from the President of the United States. I am only the humble bearer of it. May

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I venture to hope, however, that your grandmother's consent is not unpleasant to you?"

"And if it were," she broke in hastily, "it would make no difference. Senor Sanches controls my grandmother in all worldly matters."

Barrington was decidedly taken aback. The conversation had suddenly become awkward. If he were to make headway at all with Miss Castellanos he must change the subject.

"Senorita," he said abruptly, "I lit a candle in the Mission today and made a wish for the greatest desire of my heart."

She was looking at him with amiable curiosity.

"The greatest desire of your heart?" she echoed. "You must want it very much."

"I do," he replied. "Do you think I shall get it?"

In some way his earnestness seemed to impress her. She flushed a bit under his look.

"Did you ask something impossible?"

"I asked for a miracle," he replied.

"A miracle! In these days?" she scoffed.

"Why not?" he asked coolly.

"And you think you will get it?" she parried, ignoring his question.

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"When I lit the candle I confess I did not. I was very skeptical. But that hour has passed now."

"Why?"

"Because part of the miracle has already come true," he said in a low voice.

Again his manner stirred her. She moved uneasily under his gaze.

"Already come true? What can you possibly mean?"

He bent his head lower, compelling her to return his powerful gaze.

"Yes. This afternoon a part of the miracle has come true. Do you believe in mental telepathy?" he asked suddenly.

Before she could lower her eyes he saw a flash of terror creep into them. She shivered a little. Then she replied:

"How tragic, Lieutenant Barrington. For a moment your question startled me. But I have no faith in mental telepathy at all," she answered decisively. "And if you had that thought in mind when you entered the mission, I fear that you have wasted a candle."

"That remains to be seen," he replied serenely,

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studying meanwhile her stubborn eyelashes. "Remember I told you that part of the miracle had already come true."

She handed him her empty cup and arose, saying in the coolest of voices:

"How interesting! Perhaps some time you will tell me more of the miracle. Just now I feel that I must not keep you longer. Besides, I must be going."

He saw her perturbation and was triumphant. "She is afraid," he said to himself, "and she understands; just how much I am not sure, but she understands."

Aloud he continued: "May I hope to see you tomorrow, Senorita, when I call?"

Her natural poise had returned. She nodded pleasantly.

"If you really care to, Lieutenant Barrington, most likely you may. But if you stay long in Santa Barbara you will find that in an interview between my grandmother and Padre Galvez I am of small importance."

CHAPTER IX

THE next afternoon Padre Galvez guided Lieutenant Barrington to the home of Senora Castellanos. Most of the estate lay along a rolling upland, above Santa Barbara. Back of it were the mountains and stretching between them lay the valley filled with trees. Gliding over the broad acres was a silver stream. The house itself stood on a little knoll. Its thick walls, its small windows and its long porches were characteristic of Spanish-American architecture.

As the young officer entered the house he was impressed by the elegance and beauty of the interior. He and the priest were ushered into a room eighty feet long and nearly forty feet wide. It was filled with rare old Spanish tapestries, embroideries, and carved furniture. The brocade, mellowed by age, had a softness of tint which toned in with the luminous glow and polish of the old furniture. Gold and amber were the prevailing shades, although here and there a cabinet



The home of Senora Castellanos

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sparkled with rare treasures gleaming like the rays of a fire opal. Oil paintings decorated the walls and stately men and women looked down from the gilded frames.

After a few minutes had passed a tall, dignified woman of perhaps sixty-five entered. Her white hair was parted in the middle and drawn back from her face. Her blue eyes were unusually bright and penetrating, and her handsome, though rather stern countenance evidenced remarkable strength of character.

The Senora Castellanos was accounted the richest woman in California. Her wealth accumulated amazingly, but with it all she was not contented. She belonged to a race that boasts, at least, the strongest individuality on earth. She was of the pure Castilian blood, and was enough of the patrician to resent the race amalgamation that was going on in Lower California. Protected as she was by the vastness of her own estate, she appeared deaf and dumb to the encroachments of the Americans, but secretly she opposed them bitterly. If it had been in her power she would have swept back with the broom of racial pride the advancing wave of progress which makes for the

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betterment of the world. But lacking this might the senora took refuge in disdain and a concomitant seclusion.

She was a devout Catholic and there was a certain amount of coming and going necessitated by Christianity, of course. But when mass was over, her splendid grounds protected her from intrusion and her closed doors enforced the strictest privacy. Although she lived almost in the shadow of the mission her spirit was not softened. She would never mingle with the race she ignored and hated.

She greeted her guest, however, as cordially as her cold, stern nature would permit.

"I am glad to welcome you," she said, "although I am sorry to tell you that Senor Sanchez was called away this morning and cannot be with us. In fact, his business is likely to detain him several weeks in San Francisco."

"When I read the papers this morning I feared he would not be able to join us," the padre responded.

The senora inclined her head gravely. "He left at once," she murmured; then turning to Barrington she continued: "Our business interests throughout the state are sufficiently large to cause

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us great uneasiness over the tremendous conspiracies being uncovered in some of our large cities."

Barrington was aware, of course, that a big city in California was in the throes of reform. The gigantic swindle in which some of her able and most distinguished men were involved was being exposed. The papers teemed daily with thrilling accounts of the wickedness which gradually was being uncovered.

One of the results traced to it was a bad railroad strike which affected properties in which the Senora Castellanos was vitally interested. It was eventually proved that the strike was instigated by leaders of the great steal. But, though members of the gang were arrested and tried, the "man higher up" always evaded justice.

At this particular time the leaders of a disastrous strike that tied up railroad construction work in the foothills of the Sierras were being tried for a crime they had not committed, namely, throwing chains across live trolley wires. In this short-circuiting of the wires a great deal of damage was caused to the power-houses, and many of the engineers and electricians would have been killed but for timely warnings from some mys-

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terious source. The men themselves were always cautioned about the danger in time to escape.

It was to these events that the senora referred and when she had voiced her regret that Sanchez could not join them Barrington said:

"It was doubly kind of you to receive me, Senora Castellanos. I believe you usually empower Senor Sanchez to complete all business arrangements."

"That is true," she answered coldly, "yet I am quite interested in this particular entertainment. It will be the first time in years that I have entered into the world."

After nearly an hour's conversation on matters connected with the coming fête the senora arose.

"Gentlemen," she said, "the arrangements so far seem satisfactory and we will now join my granddaughter at tea in the *patio*."



CHAPTER X

THE *patio* brimmed with flowers. Roses of every shade from languid white to livid pink were scattered everywhere. Sharp scented jonquils bound by pale green sheaths sprang up beside vivid yellow mountain poppies. Across the corner of the pergola a huge *Bougainvillea* climbed beside a *Lady Banksi* and nearby, under an arch of splendid color and fragrance made by the rose of Ophir, sat Senorita Castellanos.

"How well she becomes the garden!" was Barrington's first thought.

His eyes must have expressed his admiration, for she colored as she welcomed him.

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Senora Castellanos and the priest withdrew to one side talking so earnestly that they scarcely touched the tea which a soft-footed Spanish boy was serving. In a few minutes more they had moved out of sight in the garden.

The young people sipped their tea more slowly and presently the girl said:

"Do look at the range, Lieutenant Barrington. Is it not beautiful, lying veiled in the blue shadows of the afternoon? The loftier peaks with their touches of snow make the images even stronger."

"I can scarcely believe that they are the same mountains that I crossed only a few days ago," he answered. "Their rugged sides are concealed. The streams which glide down the gorges can only be guessed at and those white clouds droop like tassels above them."

"I love the range at this time of day," Clemencia continued. "It is always so mysterious. I am glad you appreciate it, too," she smiled.

He tried to keep his eyes on the mountains as she had bidden him, but her aureole of hair like some faint yellow flame framing her face in golden light was distracting and far more attractive, he thought.

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The low tones of her voice, her deep brown eyes, and the mystery which he felt somehow enveloped her, all combined to stir the man in him. She was perilously sweet. The very place itself seemed enchanted. Below them the town hung like a scintillating jewel with shafts of light dancing over it. Beyond it the cobalt blue of the ocean melted into greens and purples, and further out the wings of a ship stretched white and gleaming.

"Miss Castellanos," he said at last, "California is a revelation to me in its beauty."

She smiled approval and he continued. "In this sunshine the columned arches and the yellow walls of your home glow like the pages of old missals. Why do your Spanish houses have that delightful air of age? American homes never do."

"Our homes do possess a by-gone quaintness," she admitted.

"Like your people, your homes will always puzzle Americans, I fear."

"Are we so mysterious, then?"

He looked at her intently. He was straightforward and sincere and he felt he would like to open his heart to her — tell her of his remarkable

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dream and of the conviction that she had partly understood when he had spoken to her of miracles. But he did not dare. He had met her only twice, and — if he should be mistaken — if she had no inkling at all of his telepathic feeling —

He had heard of cases in which two persons knew exactly the same thing at the same moment when there had been no communication between them, but they had been those who had been intimately associated, husbands and wives, or sweet-hearts. That such should be the case between persons who had never seen each other seemed almost incredible. No. He would not risk telling her until he knew her better. He could wait.

“Lieutenant Barrington, do you know that you are staring at me and that you have not answered my question?” Clemencia interposed.

Confused at being caught dreaming he replied impulsively:

“A thousand pardons, Senorita. I was surprised that you of all persons should ask me that question.”

She turned white and again he caught that frightened look which had so puzzled him before. Then she said hastily:

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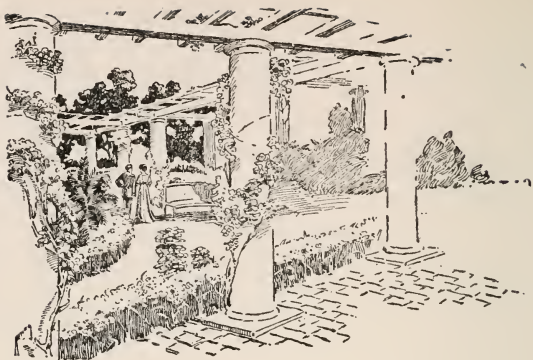
“ Why should I not ask the question, Lieutenant Barrington? ”

It was his turn to be confused. He was not prepared to speak freely, but although he had been impulsive he could not take back what he said without allowing her to think him either rude or untruthful. So bending his eyes earnestly upon her he replied seriously:

“ Senorita, I spoke impulsively, thoughtlessly. But since you insist — yes, I had a reason. It relates to the miracle I prayed for at the mission, one which I hoped you might guess. Let me cry your mercy and explain to you some other day.”

She turned hastily away without replying, but recovering her self-possession quickly, said:

“ Come, then. Let us walk through the garden and find Padre Galvez and my grandmother. The chill which blows from the Pacific every afternoon as the sun lowers is here. Do you feel it? ”



CHAPTER XI

IN the garden Clemencia recovered her self-possession completely and told Lieutenant Barrington much of the daily routine of ranch life in California.

Rows of camphor trees hedged in Senora Castellanos' fences, making her sequestration perfect. Acre after acre stretched away in beautiful seclusion. Below the knoll the railroad threaded the valley and carried its cramped passengers out into the great world. But here in the afternoon sunshine, under the shade of the huge pepper trees, their scarlet berries glinting like drops of blood against a blue sky, Barrington saw only content.

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As they joined the priest and the mistress of the ranch, the priest lifted his shovel-shaped hat, bidding the senora adieu; he then turned to Clemencia.

"My child," he said, "you did not wait to see me after mass this morning."

"But I shall tomorrow, Padre Mia," she answered affectionately.

"Ah! That is better. I believe I always begin the day better after talking with you," he said, still holding her hand.

"Padre, you spoil Clemencia," gravely chided the older woman.

"But it hasn't hurt her much — eh, Clemencia?" rejoined the priest teasingly.

"And so you go to mass every morning?" queried Barrington.

"The Spanish woman always begins her day so, sir," proudly answered the girl.

The young lieutenant promptly felt within himself an access of devotion and secretly determined to attend mass oftener.

As the two men walked down the hill Barrington could not refrain from asking a few questions concerning the life of the senora and her grand-

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daughter. Padre Galvez shook his head sadly as he answered:

"It is a dull life for Clemencia. She has so few friends."

"But surely she is attractive enough to have many," commented the young man.

"True. But alas, my son, there never was a woman who inherited more strongly the pride of old Spain than Senora Castellanos. She hates all Americans."

"Hates Americans!" exclaimed the officer. "Why?"

"She has had reason for her hatred," sighed the priest. "It was because of her daughter, Natika, Clemencia's mother. Natika was charming, but she loved unhappily, and ran away with the man she loved, an American. She was high-spirited and proud and though she always loved her husband their married life was not congenial. Eventually she quarreled with him.

"The mother, grief stricken at her daughter's elopement, bided her time, and when at last, deserted by her husband, Natika returned with little Clemencia, the senora lavished every affection and kindness on her beloved. But it was too late. The

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young wife pined for the man who had won her heart and, although she had forced him to leave her because of her violent temper, she could not recover from the shock of the separation."

"And she died then without ever seeing her husband again?" Barrington asked softly.

"No. He returned the very night she died. But the senora in a passion of fury denied him entrance. I followed him, and knowing that his repentance was sincere and that his love had never changed, I took him quietly to his wife and they were reconciled. She died in his arms."

For a moment the old priest was overcome by the memory of that day. The tears were rolling down his cheeks and he could not speak. Finally, however, he found voice to add: "Maddened with grief and remorse, two hours after his wife's death the husband killed himself. Can you wonder now at the senora's bitterness?"

Barrington could not offer a word. He was appalled at the story. Padre Galvez after a moment's pause went on.

"The senora's sorrow was awful to contemplate in its deadlike stillness. No tears would come to soften her. For a time it seemed to her

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there was no God. But after a while her soul came back to her church. Only the innocent Clemencia serves as a reminder of her tragic past."

"Then the young lady is not a Castellanos?"

"She is now. The senora had her name changed by law."



CHAPTER XII

IT took all Barrington's will power to prevent his attending mass next morning. But he thought in view of the happenings of the previous day that it would be better to wait. Later in the day he called upon Mrs. Helton.

Unless a young man is openly in love with a young woman and prepared to admit it, it is little less than marvelous to note the diplomacy and elaborate strategy he will resort to to explain his interest in her. Lieutenant Barrington, knowing of Miss Castellanos' betrothal, was willing to admit a stronger interest than admiration and a desire for her friendship during the two months he was to spend in and about Santa Barbara.

The remarkable telepathic communication given in the dream prior to his acquaintance with her was sufficient excuse, he thought, for the keen interest he was taking in her. He felt he had a right to tell her of this dream. Indeed, he was almost certain from things that had occurred

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since his vision that he had a right to ask her for the explanation he believed she could give.

But he wanted to be assured that she did need his assistance. Something troubled her, he was certain. During both their two short talks he had caught that unhappy look for a moment in her eyes. So he said to himself, as he remembered this, "She is not happy. One can see it written in her face."

He would get Mrs. Helton to speak of her friendship with Miss Castellanos. In this way he might learn something of the Spanish girl's personality, her moods, her likes and dislikes, her favorite occupations.

"I would never have known Clemencia had it not been for Padre Galvez," Mrs. Helton replied to his question as to how the acquaintance began. "And I love him because of her."

"Tell me about it," he urged.

"I'll go back to the time I saw her first," said Mrs. Helton. "She was indolent and graceful, and with her large brown eyes and sun-colored hair she gave promise even then of the remarkable beauty she possesses today."

"She is wonderfully attractive," he echoed.

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"Old beliefs, like fairy legends, linger long," Mrs. Helton continued. "It is hard to kill tradition. The Senora Castellanos wanted only Spanish associations for her granddaughter. But there came at last a day of reckoning. Padre Galvez called the mistress of the ranch to strict account, and she was obliged to listen to his arguments."

"How thrilling," smiled Barrington. "But what in the world did he do?"

"He is wonderful and he did wonders. Only an echo of what happened reached me, but it came straight because Clemencia was present."

"Ah!"

"In a tone of bitter hatred the senora said: 'I scorn the Americans as individuals.'

"'But they are strong,' replied the padre. 'You cannot ignore them collectively.'

"Then, seeing Clemencia, the senora sent her from the room. The padre must have possessed a strong weapon, though, for that night after supper the grandmother sent for the girl. 'Clemencia,' she said, 'I shall send you away to school.'

"'To school! Where?' asked the astonished girl.

"'To the convent at Los Angeles.'

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“ ‘ But, grandmamma, I don't understand. I shall meet American children. I am not sure that I wish to go.’

“ ‘ It is not a question of your wishes,’ said the senora, sternly. ‘ You will be sent.’

“ ‘ But you have never allowed me even to notice Americans as we drove through the streets of Santa Barbara. Now you wish me to be with them. I shall hate them,’ came the girl's angry response.

“ The senora's eyes glittered a moment with a strangely contented look. But she did not soften as she continued coldly: ‘ You will not question my will. You are to go the day after tomorrow.’

“ Clemencia dared not say more to the stern old woman who sat unbending in her stiff-backed chair. But she never forgot that night in the library. The flicker of the fire behind the sparkling brass andirons glowed on the white wainscotted walls, tinging them with a deep yellow. The candle light from the high sconces burned high and brilliantly. The yellow damask pillows on the sofa shone like suns until the child's eyes seemed to feel they were gazing into a golden sea. There is no embarrassment quite like that of lis-

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tening to one whom you must obey and yet fear to question. Clemencia's mind was bewildered, she told me. Coils of black smoke seemed to arise out of the yellow sea of light to blind her. The candles bleared, the fire dimmed. Almost choking with despair she said faintly:

“ ‘ I do not wish to go among American strangers,’ but even while she voiced her objection the superior will dominated.”

“ How old was she then? ” asked Barrington.

“ About fourteen. I was nearly eighteen, but we loved each other from the first.”



CHAPTER XIII

IT was not until the third day after this that Lieutenant Barrington joined Clemencia at mass. After that it became a daily occurrence that he should accompany her on her morning rides, and when he saw her in close-fitting riding habit, her small hat crowning her golden hair, coming toward him in the early morning sunshine, he always felt repaid for any loss of sleep this early devotion entailed.

"Come," he said one morning, "let us pass under the stately eucalyptus and pepper trees until we come to that old Spanish house with the low adobe one-story and tiled roof."

"The old De la Guerra house?" she asked.
"Do you love it, too?"



In the Montecito Valley

Clemencia's Crisis

"I know it is enchanted. Every one of its fascinating legends fills me with awe," he laughed.

They set forth at a gallop. From the De la Guerra place, crossing the town past the foreign poplar trees, they rode into the Montecito Valley.

"Did you ever see such sun flowers, lilacs, and morning glories?" she asked.

"Never," he answered, "and this is March."

"Strangers never see our California," replied Clemencia somewhat sadly. "They come in winter, and it is summer which is our loveliest season. You should see the spikes of the snowy yucca rising out of their sharp-pointed leaves then. That is a sight not easily forgotten."

"There is a spell in this wonderful California, Miss Castellanos — one I could never deny."

But he continued lightly, "If this witchery which causes one to remember every trivial incident in this sunny clime is more enticing, more developed in summer, perhaps it is just as well I cannot remain." There was a lightness in his speech but a certain intensity of tone that caused the girl to color slightly.

"Ah, even in your short stay you have felt it, too!"

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"I have felt it strongly — more than the ordinary sojourner, I think, for already two wonderful mysteries have come to me."

He broke off abruptly, thinking first of his experience with the nun and then of his dream of Clemencia.

He was not particularly susceptible to feminine charm — not more so than the average man — and had known the spell of companionship with delightful women. But until he had met Clemencia no woman had really attracted him. He recalled with a smile that an observing friend had once said to him:

"Barrington, you are too coolly analytical of women to really enjoy them."

But this girl stirred his soul. She interested and mystified him. Was it her cool, clear, reasoning mind, her poise, or her really exquisite beauty that held him?

Often her words suggested little undercurrents of thought which turned his own mind into deeper channels. She was certainly a girl of individual ideas. One morning she observed oracularly:

"Tastes and sympathies in common are absolutely necessary for happiness."

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"I differ with you there," answered Barrington, taking up the gauntlet.

"But it is impossible to be happy unless people agree!" she exclaimed.

"Are we discussing friendship or love?" laughed her companion.

"Both," she replied. "One cannot differentiate."

"Again I beg to differ. Something tells me that differences of opinion are not incompatible with happiness."

But Clemencia was not to be convinced by such argument.

"Intuition is all very well in some cases," she said. "But if a determined nature meets another with a strain of iron in the blood unhappiness must surely follow."

"Not necessarily. Inflexible as such natures may be, love is stronger."

"Is love then so wonderful a thing?" asked the girl. "To me it has always seemed incomprehensible."

Barrington was silent. The remark seemed flippant. For a betrothed girl it was curiously out of place, he thought. He looked at her search-

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ingly, but she showed no embarrassment whatever. So he ignored the lightness of her speech and answered seriously:

"Yes, love, they say, is wonderful. Those whom the divine spark has touched with love for each other never need have any fear of serious friction."

He was watching her steadily. She was not for him. She was "forbidden fruit." His thoughts must not dwell upon her. Yet try as he would he could not control them. He found himself analyzing her, trying to fathom her feeling for the other man. What manner of man was he whom she had chosen? His name was never mentioned. Did he appreciate the wonderful charm of the woman who had pledged herself to him? And her curious remark about love? Did she not know its meaning yet?

"A penny for your thoughts, Lieutenant Barrington!" Clemencia's voice interrupted his reverie.

He flushed. "I was debating your curious views of love," he answered, "and how easily I could shatter them."

For a moment her own face reflected his color,

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but she quickly recovered herself, and speaking lightly said:

“ Oh, do explain! ”

“ There are two people I know who, tested by your theory, are unsuited to each other. Yet they have lived many years in perfect accord.”

“ Oh, then, they could not have been incompatible! ”

“ But they were, really. She was very worldly. He was a student, a lawyer, and indifferent to society. She was a devout Catholic. He was a Protestant. They had not the same point of view in anything.”

“ And were they really happy? ”

“ Absolutely so.”

“ And you think it was love that gave them happiness? ”

“ Their natures were absolute contrasts. Therefore it was love alone that did it. What else could it have been? ”

Again the girl flushed. “ Do tell me of them, please.”

“ She was the daughter of an Irish nobleman and was exquisite in face and mind. Her father held a responsible position at the English court,

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although most of his time was spent in his home in Ireland.

“ However, it was in England that the man met her first. He was an American. His father was ambassador to the court of St. James. The Irish maiden, with her brilliant beauty and superb health, was wonderfully attractive and when the young American carried her off across the sea as his bride it was not without protest from many a young English nobleman who had paid her homage. But, though he had won her fairly, he had fought a hard battle, and for two winters he had struggled, scarcely knowing from day to day whether he could ever claim her.”

“ She was beautiful, you say? ” interrupted Clemencia.

“ Beautiful, fascinating beyond description, but very imperious. She had no desire to go to America. Save for the one important fact that she was madly in love nothing could have dragged her there. Indeed, she fought hard to escape her captor and did not hesitate to tell him frankly that it was against her reason and her will that he had won her heart.

“ At times she was so stormily certain that she

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could never make up her mind to marry him and leave Ireland, her beloved home, that he almost lost courage and wondered (although he knew that she loved him) whether he really could make her happy."

"How long were they betrothed?"

"Two years, during which time she wrote more than once to him, 'I have changed my mind. I am sure I do not love you.' And then before the time necessary for the letter to reach him had gone by he would get a cablegram saying: 'Believe nothing in my letter!'

"The lover in his law office would feel a great depression. He would guess in advance the contents of that letter, and he would say to himself: 'If she is so uncertain of herself, should I not release her?' But he could never bring himself to the point of giving her up so long as his imperious lady gave him the slightest spark of hope. So when he read the letter he turned to the cablegram for consolation and held to the engagement through all the perilous storms."

"How splendid of him to be so patient! And you say that he got his reward?"

"Yes. One day she came to him clad in shim-

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mering white and clouds of misty veiling, with a love light in her eyes that was unmistakable. That light has held undimmed through all the years since."

"What a wonderful love story! It quite thrills me. Who was the woman?"

"Maude Arslan, my mother."

For a moment Clemencia was silent. Then she said almost harshly:

"What a beautiful atmosphere you must have been brought up in!"

"But there are many such people in the world, I am sure," Barrington responded.

Clemencia sat for a moment lost in thought. "I wonder I did not guess your story," she said presently, "for it seems to me I have heard something of the same before." Again she sat musing and Barrington, rather nonplussed at her words, made no attempt to cross-question her.

"Padre Galvez has told me something of your history," the girl volunteered, at last, "though he did not mention any names. The devotion of your mother must have been wonderful."

"Yes, but she tells my father now that in those stormy days of courtship she was showing only

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primitive woman rebelling at the thought of bondage. Once married she knew that she should do him homage forever."

"Then your father is not a Catholic?"

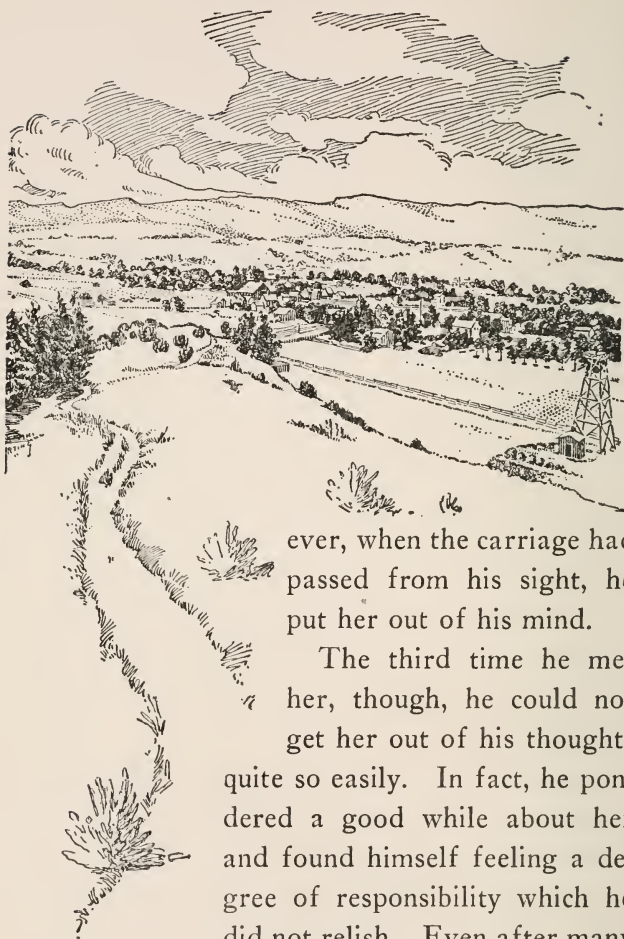
"No. But his mind is broad. The Arslans of Ireland have been of the faith for centuries and even here in America that faith is so welded with history that it challenges his admiration. He cannot read a page of the story of the early days of his country nor of a battle fought which does not bear the weight of the Catholic clergy. But I have told you a long story when I meant only to convince you that love can exist for persons who are supposed to be absolutely unsuited by nature."

CHAPTER XIV

A FEW mornings later on the streets of Santa Barbara Lieutenant Barrington almost collided with a woman who came suddenly out of a store. He found himself face to face with the pretty Spanish girl whom he had met on the outskirts of the town on the day of his arrival. She was dressed in the height of fashion and was about to step into a carriage. He recognized her at once and instinctively put his hand to his hat. But the girl regarded him haughtily, giving no sign of recognition. With head held high and the coolest of stares she said as plainly as if she had spoken the words: "I do not know you at all. I never saw you before."

Barrington could scarcely suppress his mirth. She was certainly a cool one. The girl was even prettier in street clothes than in her riding habit. He wondered vaguely what her name was and what could have been her quarrel with that good-looking Spanish husband. In a little while, how-

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ever, when the carriage had passed from his sight, he put her out of his mind.

The third time he met her, though, he could not get her out of his thoughts quite so easily. In fact, he pondered a good while about her and found himself feeling a degree of responsibility which he did not relish. Even after many days of consideration he was no nearer a solution.

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For his third view of her was in the library of Senora Castellanos' home. She was seated in front of a typewriter taking dictation from the older woman. The officer had called by appointment in regard to detailed arrangements for the reception of the fleet.

"Lieutenant Barrington," said the senora, "Miss Morro, the secretary from my business office in Santa Barbara. I thought Miss Morro could be of assistance to us this morning. She is an expert typist."

Barrington bowed, eyeing the girl steadily. The young woman inclined her head quietly in return. She gave no sign of recognition, but he fancied he saw a faint rise of color in her cheeks.

The officer was certainly a bit disturbed over the senora's introduction of her secretary. The young woman whom he had so valiantly defended was not married then! Yet what other construction could he put upon the Spaniard's words, "This woman is mine!"

Barrington tried to argue that it was none of his business anyway. Why should he concern himself about her? Yet he could not help being strongly dissatisfied at finding her in so confiden-

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tial a relation to Senora Castellanos. In spite of himself, the feeling of responsibility increased. He resented it. Why should a common quarrel between a man and a woman whom he had never seen before so disturb him? But the fact that Miss Morro had tacitly admitted being the man's wife and was now allowing herself to be presented to him as an unmarried woman, offering no explanation, *did* worry him. He determined to find out something about her. All inquiries elicited merely the information that she had been in the senora's employ for about five years, was her confidential secretary and was highly respected by the older woman. After a few hours spent in her presence Barrington was himself impressed by her air of candor.

"I wonder," he mused, "whether I did not dream that scene on the roadway, also."

CHAPTER XV

A DAY or two later Barrington received a note from Mrs. Helton saying, "Will you come to my house party?"

He went, hoping that he would meet Clemencia, but the girl was not there. Guessing his disappointment, his hostess whispered:

"Clemencia comes tomorrow, but alas! the man who dominates her comes also."

"What man?" inquired the young officer, paling a little at the announcement.

"Her cousin, Senor Sanchez. I dared not ask her without him. Senora Castellanos might have refused to let her come."

"From various hints you have dropped, Mrs. Helton, it is easy to guess that Senor Sanchez is the happy man."

"Happy man?" asked Mrs. Helton in surprise.

"The fiancé — the lover," answered Barrington with a lightness he was far from feeling.

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She stared at him a moment with a puzzled look.

"Oh! Do you always jump at conclusions so quickly?"

"Well, am I wrong in guessing that Senor Sanchez is a bit jealous, loves her desperately, and fears to give the attractive Miss Castellanos too much freedom?"

"He loves her desperately, of course. The Spaniards always do. But Senor Sanchez is too selfish to love anybody but himself very thoroughly."

"Evidently he is not in your good graces."

"Indeed, he is not. He always gives me the creeps. But cheer up! Though I have asked him here for two days," she laughed merrily, "I was very careful not to include him in the invitation to motor to Coronado for the arrival of the fleet."

"He will not be one of the party, then?"

"He would spoil Clemencia's pleasure, and besides," mockingly, "I have asked you. You are not afraid to go, are you, even though Clemencia is pledged?"

He flushed, for her insinuation was plain. He

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knew that she was aware of his morning rides with Miss Castellanos.

"I am not afraid," he answered, giving back her smile, "but," he added, "tell me more of Miss Castellanos and her engagement."

"Not a word," she retorted. "Not a word. The subject is taboo with me. Clemencia knows that I do not approve of it, but I will not discuss it. If you are to hear more on that subject she herself must be your informant. I reiterate my warning, however. Save your heart. Do not care too much. The step she is about to take is inevitable."

"It will be soon, then?"

"In less than six months."

As she finished, half laughingly, half seriously, she gave the signal to rise and left him to ponder over her words. She was well aware of the officer's growing interest in her friend, but she challenged it. She said to herself: "It does not concern me and, apparent as it is, I have warned him. Now the matter rests in Clemencia's own hands."

CHAPTER XVI

THE ancients looked upon nature with charming error. They were dazzled by the presence of imaginary gods. But it is strange that with all our mature conviction we are still subtly impressed by the mysterious. Like the wonderful carpet fairy legend gives us which traverses all space at its master's call and then obeys his command, mystery floats undulating, trembling, held by unseen hands, weaving a spell to bind us to expectancy of some greater revelation close at hand. And so Arslan Barrington, all unconsciously, was slowly but surely entering those dangerous seas on which many a better mariner has been wrecked.

The young officer had been restless all day and late in the afternoon was returning from a vigorous walk in the canyon back of the San Isidro Inn. Immersed in thought, he strode rapidly forward, scarcely conscious of the beautiful surroundings, which perhaps was just what could be

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expected of a young man whose mental vision was bounded by the face of a girl with an appeal in her lovely eyes and whose hair shone like gold.

Suddenly the stillness of the place was broken by the angry tones of a man speaking Spanish: "Unless you wish to be held among that light class of women whom the world condemns for fickleness of purpose you must keep faith."

Unconsciously Barrington stopped and as he did so there came in lower tones the sound of a woman's voice seemingly in gentle remonstrance. He could not distinguish the words, but when she had finished the man spoke again irritably:

"Just like a woman. For a whim you seek excuse to change your mind. A vow such as you have solemnly given cannot be broken lightly. It would be apostasy — save for one reason I have given you."

"I have not said that I desired to break it," interrupted the other hastily. "I spoke only of conscientious qualms — that perhaps after all I was unsuited."

They were coming toward him, and with a thrill Barrington recognized Clemencia's voice.

"Then," pleaded the man in a milder tone,

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"think well of all I have said, Clemencia. Marry me at once. That would solve the difficulty. Your grandmother would soon — "

"Say no more," the girl answered nervously. "I will keep my word. I will hold to my pledge, but I will speak no more on this subject for six months."

The lieutenant moved forward and a turn in the path revealed Miss Castellanos and a man.

Clemencia's face showed her agitation and distress, but he hardly noticed her in his hurried recognition of her companion. It was the Spaniard who had treated Miss Morro so brutally!

This, then, was the lover! His instinct had not misled him in his first dislike of the man. Clemencia must have noticed the consternation in his face, but she said calmly:

"Lieutenant Barrington, my cousin, Senor Sanchez."

For a moment Barrington was speechless. He acknowledged the Spaniard's greetings with a bow and then recovering himself said curtly:

"We have met before."

Both men were irritated and the attitude of the one to the other was decidedly antagonistic. That

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much was apparent to Clemencia and she could not help exclaiming: "You have met before — where?"

With an ugly laugh her cousin said:

"Do not insist upon an answer. Lieutenant Barrington and I are doomed to have inopportune encounters."

Barrington's eyes flamed at the rudeness of the remark, but he kept his temper.

"I quite agree with Senor Sanchez, Senorita," he responded. "This meeting seems even more unpleasant than the last."

Bowing gravely to Clemencia as he passed he then lifted his hat to the man. For the fraction of a second their glances met and held. In the brilliant black eyes of the Spaniard flashed insolence and a gleam of something like hatred. In the steel-blue orbs of the young officer contempt was plainly visible. In cutting tones he said:

"Senor Sanchez, I desire even more earnestly than before the fulfillment of the wish I made when last we parted."

He was furious at the man's insolence, and his fists ached at the restraint he had put upon them. Furthermore, it angered him that the Spaniard

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with his flashing black eyes, white teeth, dark mustache and fine figure was certainly handsome.

But was a girl of Clemencia's type to be dominated by the spirit of such a man? He was utterly unworthy of her. Not only his behavior with Miss Morro needed an explanation of the fullest sort, but his whole manner indicated that he was not built on lines which a woman could respect. After his two encounters with him Barrington was willing to swear that a girl of Clemencia's lofty ideals and mentality could not be won by such a man. Yet she was engaged to him!

At dinner that night Clemencia was unusually silent. Over the whole party, in fact, there seemed to fall a kind of restraint. Mrs. Helton, excellent hostess that she was, recognized it and with her woman's wit determined to offset it. She turned to the man who sat next to her and said:

"I propose that we all tell a story."

"Good!" came the answer. "But of what kind?"

"Oh, anything. A personal experience, a sudden impression — really, any criticism or complaint will pass," she finished laughingly.

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"Well, as the instigator of the conspiracy you must begin," her neighbor replied.

Anecdotes and short stories followed each other in quick succession, but when it came Barrington's turn he found himself unprepared. The depression which had followed his experience of the afternoon was still strong upon him.

"May I just pay a compliment?" he asked.

"Yes, if it is a very nice one," answered his hostess.

"You have the finest country club I ever saw."

A ripple of pleasure went round the table. Their country club was their delight.

"Thank you, lieutenant, and may I hope you do not condemn us as always drinking cocktails and playing bridge as so many visitors do?" said Mrs. Helton.

"Oh, no; your country club is not only for the rich who enjoy it because of the cool oysters, iced champagne, and black coffee to be had there. I admired especially the athletic youths and maidens I saw there with their golf, tennis, and horseback riding."

"Evidently Lieutenant Barrington likes only the hatless amazons?" interposed Senor Sanchez,

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leaning forward. There was a veiled contempt in his tone as if he would belittle the admiration Arslan had expressed.

"I like the independence of the life," calmly answered Barrington. "The Gibson girl with her high-bred air expressive of character and disdain is more to my taste than the maidens of our grandmothers' days."

"And you believe the country club responsible for the change?" asked Sanchez.

"I believe the country club is helping our youth, and that by its aid we are building a nobility for America to be proud of — the nobility of robust health."

"Beautiful sentiments, undoubtedly," laughed the Spaniard. "But to my mind there are higher aspirations."

He was looking straight at Barrington as he spoke. There was nothing in the words themselves to challenge anger particularly. But somehow his manner always seemed aggressive when he addressed the young officer.

"My story," said Sanchez, when it came his turn, "is of a different type of woman — one you cannot fail to admire. It is of the unselfish

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woman who believes it better to have ideals and to live up to them! ”

He had turned to his hostess and was now speaking directly to her. She grew restless under his gaze and answered nervously:

“ I hate the woman who is always making sacrifices. It does not seem fair.”

“ But she, after all, is the woman whom the world glorifies, is she not? ” queried Sanchez.

“ Perhaps. But one thing is certain. She never gets any happiness out of it herself.”

The white teeth of Sanchez gleamed in amusement as he said:

“ As happiness is only relative, madame, who will say that she does not? ”

CHAPTER XVII

SANCHEZ swept a challenging glance around the table, but as no one was disposed to debate with him the question of what constitutes happiness, he commenced his story.

“ In New Orleans, that city of sunshine and magnolias, there lived a charming French girl — beautiful Mathilde Gouriet. She was the only daughter among six sons and from her childhood she had set her heart upon being a nun. Her parents, though devout Catholics, did not approve of her wish and so being an affectionate and dutiful daughter she deferred to them. When she was about twenty-six, however, her parents died and then she faced her brothers with her desire.

“ Seeing that her mind was fully made up to take the step they consented — provided that she would wait two years. Then she began a strange novitiate. With her brothers she traveled the world over. They sought the secrets of the Chinese shrines, entered into the spirit of the desert

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and whispered to the Sphinx and the Pyramids. They lingered in Europe and by every joy that mortal mind could devise the brothers tried to win her back to the world."

Mrs. Helton grew nervous and moved uneasily in her chair. Calling a servant, she ordered another window opened. The smooth tones of the Spaniard continued:

"At last, however, they returned home. A little later her brothers invited the youth and beauty of the Crescent City to the most brilliant ball of the season. Mathilde's loveliness was supreme that night. Her soft ivory-tinted skin had no suspicion of paleness. Her abundant hair was crowned with diamonds and her bare arms glittered with the same costly gems. In her white gown she looked like a bride save for the absence of a veil. Every one who looked at her was thrilled. The next morning she entered the convent. It was the wish of her brothers that she should leave the world in this dramatic setting."

Silence filled the room when Sanchez had finished his story. At last some one said:

"It is dramatic, but is it true?"

"Absolutely true, Senorita. And is not

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Mathilde Gouriet a type of spiritual purity worthy of the middle ages? ”

“ For the love of heaven don't say yes,” broke in Mrs. Helton. “ To my mind she was a fanatic. Her story gives me the creeps.”

“ But she had the courage of her conviction,” persisted Sanchez. “ She allowed no worldly consideration to tempt her from it.”

“ She was narrow-minded,” retorted Mrs. Helton, hotly. “ Think of what the world held for her and how heedlessly she abandoned it. But come,” she said, rising, “ let's go into the *patio*. The air is stifling here.”

The men remained in the dining-room over their wine and cigars, with the exception of Sanchez, who, as Clemencia passed, addressed a few words to her and then accompanied her from the room. Barrington noticed that she drew back slightly and seemed to shiver. However, he was helpless and could not interfere.

Clemencia had said but little during the dinner. Of this Barrington was quite sure, for he had not been able to get her out of his thoughts at all and had sent many a furtive glance in her direction. When he saw the Spaniard accompanying

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Clemencia from the table he had a moody feeling of discontent. But he reasoned with himself: "They are engaged. I will not allow my mind to dwell upon her so continually. She is nothing to me." Yet in some way, even as he said this, he felt strangely out of tune with everything.

He became quite oblivious to his surroundings, but was suddenly aware that Mr. Helton was speaking:

"The man is a cad. I have long been suspicious of his morals. But he certainly has an unholy influence over Clemencia and Senora Castellanos. I have never liked him and Clemencia knows it. But to tell that story! Well, I have no words to express my contempt. Yet he was my guest. What could I say?"

Then becoming aware that Barrington was gazing at him curiously he said apologetically:

"Excuse me, Barrington, for criticising a man under my own roof, but our Spanish friend always seems to get upon my nerves."

Everybody laughed and the subject was dismissed.

CHAPTER XVIII

BARRINGTON found himself the next day decided on a course that he had never followed before in his life — the prying into affairs of others when they had no direct concern with his own. Though he despised Sanchez for more reasons than one he was convinced that his prejudice was not wholly a biased one. The Spanish dandy was undoubtedly a scoundrel. Regardless of Sanchez's relations to Miss Castellanos, which the young lieutenant deplored without seeing just how he could disrupt them, he had determined to try and learn whether the young secretary, Miss Morro, was a misled victim of Sanchez's charm — or, something else.

Matters pertaining to the reception of the fleet made it necessary for Barrington to call on the Senora Castellanos that morning, so he decided to begin his investigations at once.

Chance favored him, for when he was ushered into the library of the senora's home he found

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Miss Morro there alone. She arose as he came in and apologized for her employer's absence, who was ill with a headache.

Miss Morro, however, gave him no opportunity to question her. Work was prepared and she at once delved into it. After a few minutes had passed Barrington interrupted boldly. He knew that Sanchez was expected and would join them within an hour.

"Miss Morro," he said, "please let the work wait a minute. Since yesterday I feel that I must ask you a question. You owe me an explanation."

"Of what, Senor Barrington?" the girl replied, with a look of surprise in her eyes and a haughty toss of her head.

"Of the scene I witnessed the first day I saw you."

Her dark brows, set close to the bridge of her nose, met suddenly in a frown. But this was the only sign she gave of being taken by surprise. She sat back negligently in her chair, swinging her foot and staring at him, but her voice when she spoke had no inflection of displeasure.

"You are extremely impertinent, Senor," she said slowly.

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"I assure you that I do not mean to be."

"Then truly your words do you an injustice, Sir!"

Barrington leaned forward still watching her narrowly.

"Miss Morro," he said, "we may be interrupted at any moment. Do not bandy words. I am quite serious in my demand that you tell me clearly the meaning of that scene."

At this her temper flashed out unmistakably.

"By what right do you question me?" she demanded wrathfully.

Her flushed face and brilliantly angry eyes did not disturb Barrington's imperturbability in the least. He regarded her silently for an instant and then replied:

"Yesterday I saw Senor Sanchez for the second time."

He thought he noticed her wince at this, but she sat up straighter in her chair and then leaned toward him defiantly.

"Well?" she volunteered. "What of that?"

"Until then I had no idea that he was the man I associated with you."

"And now that you associate him with me,"

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she said scornfully, " I reiterate, what gives you the right to question me? "

" Miss Morro," he said, " we are only wasting time. You know very well that I took you to be his wife. What else could I infer from his statement to me which you heard, ' This woman is mine! ' "

She laughed. " Why don't you ask *him* then? "

" I want the truth from you."

She narrowed her lids until her eyes scarcely showed at all.

" Could he not best explain his own words? " she said.

" He would lie to me if I asked him."

" And will I not lie also? "

" Senorita, I have seen you here every day for a week. I am sure you will tell me the truth."

" You insult me and pay me a compliment in the same breath, Senor. Oh, the strangeness of man! "

" Miss Morro," he persisted earnestly, " please believe me when I tell you that I have no desire to learn your secret, if there is one. But the happiness of a lady in whom I take a great interest is involved in this matter. Only yesterday I

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learned that this is so. Otherwise, I should never have interfered."

"And you really think I will tell you the truth?"

"Need we go further into that? I have studied you more closely than you are aware, but that was unnecessary. Instinct told me at once that you were truthful."

The girl moved restlessly. "You said a woman was involved," she said at last. "May I be permitted to ask what woman?"

"Is it possible that you do not know that Senor Sanchez is engaged?"

"What do you mean?" she screamed.

Barrington was utterly unprepared for such an outburst. She broke out furiously in a storm of denial. Was she acting? Was it possible that she had never heard before the fact which he supposed generally known?

"It is false, Senor Barrington, absolutely false," she stormed, her face convulsed with anger.

Appalled at the violence of her temper he could scarcely find words to reply. But he realized the importance of calming her.

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"Miss Morro," he said, "you must control yourself. Remember, we may be interrupted at any minute."

He poured her out a glass of water and she drank it eagerly while she struggled to regain her self-control.

"Pull yourself together," he said encouragingly. "There must be some way out of this affair. Let me help you if I can."

That Sanchez was deserving of any punishment Barrington did not for a moment doubt. But this was no time to impress that opinion upon Miss Morro. His heart went out in sympathy to the girl. She was suffering deeply.

"Senor," she said, and her voice fell almost to a whisper in her distress, "who is the woman? I must know her name."

"Is it possible, Miss Morro, that you do not know that Sanchez is to marry his cousin!"

Absolute horror was depicted on her face as she gasped:

"You cannot mean Miss Castellanos?"

The girl's face was ashen.

"Senor Barrington," she said slowly, "she can never marry him."

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Barrington hoped she spoke the truth. Aloud he asked:

"Why?"

"There are some vows too holy to be broken."

"Then you are his wife?"

"I cannot answer," cried the girl in distress, "but a curse will surely come upon him if he marries her."

"Why will you not tell me what I want to know?" he demanded sternly. "If you are his wife, say so. If not, what claim have you upon him?"

"I will not answer your question. The affair is mine, and his. But this much I will tell you. He shall never marry another, that I swear!"

Barrington found no time to question her further. He heard the outer door close. Some one was coming. Miss Morro went back trembling to her desk, and bent over her papers, saying as she did so in a low voice:

"Meet me tonight, Senor, under the eucalyptus trees. I must talk with you."

A moment later when Sanchez entered her face was perfectly composed, and she was apparently absorbed in her duties.



CHAPTER XIX

THAT night, under the eucalyptus trees, Juanita Morro sobbed out her story to the naval officer. Standing in the shadow of the great trees she said tragically:

“He shall never leave me. No other woman shall ever have him. Senor Barrington, my love for Sanchez has made me wicked. I am reckless without it. No matter what I feel, no matter how I strive against him, once in his arms I am helpless. What you saw that first day out on the edge of the town is proof of what I say. He has often struck me, yet I love him more than my life. Help me. I am in despair.”

“You have spoken to him, then?”

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"Alas, yes. And he has dared to tell me he will marry his cousin in spite of me. But I know he cannot marry her. That is but an idle threat to frighten me."

"Then why are you so miserable?"

"Because he loves her and no longer loves me. Even without the marriage I am lost."

Barrington was helpless in the presence of the woman's grief. There was no remedy he could offer. Then, too, though he was genuinely sorry for the girl, her misery was literally nothing before the great consequences which might befall Clemencia. Was a woman of her exquisite personality to be sacrificed to such as Sanchez? A thousand times no. Yet how could he prevent such disaster?

"Senor, you came unbidden to my help once. Will you not help me now?"

"I would gladly do so if I could," he replied. "But I cannot prevent the marriage. Neither can you keep a man who has ceased to love you."

"It is more than the mere fact that I love him," she said in a low voice. "He must make me an honest woman. He has sworn to marry me. Oh, Senor, help me to win him back!"

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"Would to God that I could, Miss Morro! But if you have no claim upon him I see no way."

"They will never marry. I have told you that often. But if he continues to love her I will kill her."

"Hush!" he said sternly, seizing her arm. "Do not talk so wildly. If I thought that you would injure a hair on her head I would — well, you must not speak of her like that, you understand!"

"Ah, I see. You love her, too!"

"Leave Miss Castellanos out of the question," he replied roughly, "if you wish me to help you."

"Senor," she said very softly, "so much the better. I will not hate her if you love her. Only help me to win Sanchez back. But if I cannot do that there is still another way. I have not been his confidential secretary for nothing," and her face darkened.

"What do you mean?"

"That I will not tell you. I suspected long ago that he might wish some day to leave me and I determined to have a weapon to fight him with if he did."

"And you have such a weapon?"

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"I have, and if I can hold him no other way I can do so by means of this."

Barrington regarded her curiously. What a mixture of love and revenge she cherished in that pretty head of hers! Perhaps, however, it was just as well, he thought, that she could feel as she did. Aloud he said:

"Miss Morro, if there is any earthly reason why Senor Sanchez is not fit to wed his cousin the sin will be on your head if you do not expose him."

"Well, perhaps I shall never use what I know. Did I not tell you I was but as wax in his hands? But I am still beautiful, Senor Barrington. I will not allow myself to believe that I have lost him yet."

She was a girl of spirit. How in the world could such a man as Sanchez have won her so completely? She was loyalty itself, and with all his perfidy staring her in the face she still wanted him.

"Senor Barrington," she continued, "in two days Senorita Castellanos accompanies Mrs. Helton to the Coronado and you are doubtless included in the party. Well, I will try my beauty

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on Sanchez in her absence. He loved me once. I will bide my time in silence till you return. If I win, you will never know the weapon I hold against him. If I lose, well, perhaps I may have more to tell you then."



CHAPTER XX

IT was the night before Clemencia was to accompany the Heltons to Coronado Beach. Her packing was almost finished and she stood eyeing the last bag thoughtfully. Had she or her maid forgotten anything? As she stood musing the deep-toned voice of the senora called to her:

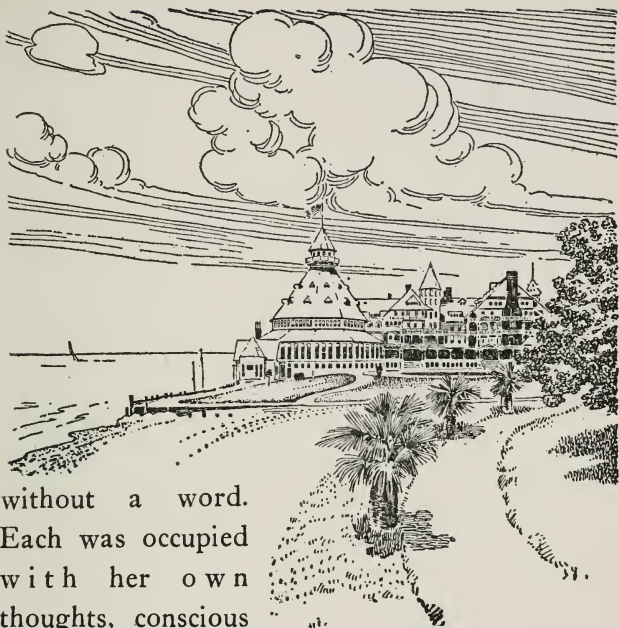
"Clemencia, I desire a word with you."

"Certainly, Grandmamma," the girl replied, somewhat surprised, for the hour was late and she had supposed her grandmother had retired. "Shall I come to your study?"

"No. It is not necessary. I can say what I have to say here. Yet"—she hesitated a moment—"on second thought perhaps the study *would* be best. Your maid may interrupt us any moment here, and," she added gravely, "I want your individual attention."

Clemencia bowed obediently and followed her grandmother from the room. They traversed the long corridor, which separated their apartments,

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without a word. Each was occupied with her own thoughts, conscious that a combat of will, if such ensued, would be violent. With all the respect which Clemencia bore her grandmother there had been times of late when she had found it difficult to acquiesce unquestionably in many of her wishes.

A low fire burned on the hearth in the senora's study and a bright reading lamp stood beside an open book. She motioned Clemencia to a chair.

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"It is quite late, Grandmamma," the girl protested, "and my packing is not quite finished. Will you keep me long?"

"Not longer than is necessary."

Clemencia shivered a little as she sank back into the soft cushions. She recalled that other evening many years ago when she learned that she was to go to an American school. Tonight the determination written in the senora's eyes was hardly less pronounced than then.

"Clemencia," the old woman began again in a caustic tone, "I should never have consented to this trip to the Coronado had I known that Sanchez was not to be of the party."

"Surely you cannot hold me responsible for that!" exclaimed the girl.

"Not responsible, perhaps, but you should have declined to accept an invitation which did not include him."

"I do not care to discuss that," she answered, rising from her chair.

"I think you were partly to blame, but keep your seat and your temper," her grandmother added dryly, "for I have by no means finished what I wish to say."

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Clemencia settled back. "You have never liked Agatha," she said hotly, and her voice held a suspicion of tears.

"For that very reason you should be more grateful that I permit you to visit her so often."

It was not easy to answer that statement, for in a measure it was true. Yet Clemencia recalled with resentment the fact that each one of her visits to her friend invariably entailed some disagreeable scene with the senora.

The latter's keen eyes were now watching her closely and, it must be admitted, disapprovingly. She allowed for the heat of youth and the disparity of years between them. But in the agitation of the younger woman the senora thought she detected more than the mere resentment of youth. Her tone had a touch of asperity when she spoke again.

"My objection today is not a question of my dislike for Mrs. Helton. The basis of it is of vastly more importance than that frivolous little woman could inspire."

Clemencia lifted her eyes to her grandmother's face and for a moment the two women held each other's glance in angry silence. The senora was

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calm with the serenity born of her years. The girl's eyes finally wavered under her look and fell.

"I do not understand what you mean, Grand-mamma," she said in a low voice.

"Are you quite sure that you do not, Clemencia?"

Red and white warred in the girl's face, but she spoke firmly. "I cannot even guess unless it is as you say, that you are disturbed that Manuel is not going. Is that it?"

"No!" The senora's voice rang hard and stern. "No. That is not the real reason."

"Then what is it?"

The old woman leaned forward and her words came cold and incisive.

"I will give two reasons. First, I learned today that you were hesitating upon the step you have sworn to take before the altar."

Clemencia sprang to her feet. "It is not true!" she cried. "Sanchez lied when he told you that."

"On the contrary, he told me with sorrow in his heart. He loves you tenderly."

"He is too selfish to love anyone tenderly. He knows that I despise him. Yet he torments me daily."

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"You are unjust and wrong. His is a devoted affection."

"But I, at least, am truthful. Manuel always puts me on the defensive with you. It is always Manuel whom you believe. Never for a moment do you judge me except through his eyes."

"I repeat that his influence has nothing whatever to do with my views this time."

The senora's quiet manner and calm assurance unconsciously impressed Clemencia and her own voice was less aggressive.

"Why do you doubt me then, Grandmamma?"

"I have a great reason to do so."

"What possible reason could you have?"

"You shall hear! Listen. This is my second reason. You have ridden too many times with the American naval officer. You have been seen for hours with this stranger, and he it is instead of Manuel who is to accompany you to Coronado Beach. Is that not enough?" and her eyes glittered with rage.

Clemencia stood tall, straight, and very white. Her head was uplifted in haughty defiance. For a moment she could not reply and even when she found her voice it trembled.

Clemencia's Crisis

"Well? Why should I not ride with him?"

"Do you consider it right?"

"Was it not plainly stipulated that for six months I should be free?"

"You should not play with fire."

"There is no fire."

"There might be should you continue."

"And if I do not choose to stop?"

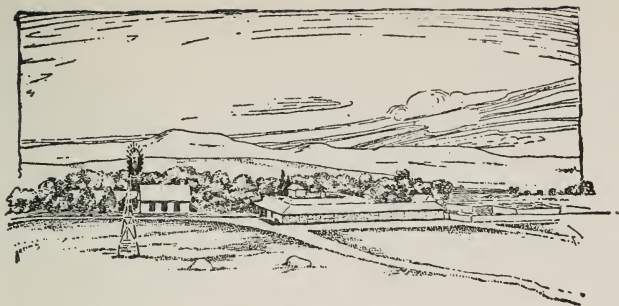
"It is then as I feared!" the older woman cried out despairingly. Suddenly she turned white and holding her hand to her heart as if in great pain she sank limply into her chair. In a moment Clemencia was at her side crying remorsefully.

"Oh, forgive me! Forgive me, I really did not mean what I said!"

"My child," said the senora, struggling to regain her composure and stroking the girl's hair tenderly, "beware of the American. When I think of your unhappy mother I tremble for you. It is my love which makes me want to keep you from them all."

Clemencia smiled up warmly into her face.

"Do not fear for me, Grandmamma," she cried. "I am bound forever by my oath. I shall never forget."



CHAPTER XXI

THE strike made travel by railroad uncertain, so Mrs. Helton determined to make the trip to Coronado by motor instead of in her husband's luxurious private car.

In the lovely spring weather there was little danger from storms, and then there was the delight of running over the mountains and across the valleys at a speed that suited one's mood. She and her husband with Clemencia and Lieutenant Barrington formed the party.

They left Santa Barbara one brilliant morning shortly after sunrise and skirting gardens, vineyards, and ranches, began climbing the Casitas Pass. They were reversing the trip which Barrington had made on foot across that glorious

Clemencia's Crisis

summit. He pointed out to them the way he had taken and showed them the spot where he had stood and obtained his first glimpse of Santa Barbara.

Although he talked much of his never to be forgotten tramp over the Casitas, he said not a word of the episode under the great pepper tree in the lower valley. It seemed like sacrilege to mention that experience to others. He felt he had stumbled accidentally upon a tragedy, and the proximity of the scene recalled vividly that picture of a woman's misery.

Mrs. Helton's gay voice interrupted his reverie and he looked up to see both women watching him. But in the eyes of Miss Castellanos there was not the surprise or amusement he detected in those of Mrs. Helton. She seemed, by her intense look, to ask a question, and while her face betrayed anxiety he was aware that it prompted in him a curious sensation of pleasure. Mrs. Helton was saying:

"Do you know that you broke off abruptly in the description of your walk and have not spoken a word for five minutes?"

Barrington apologized for his abstraction and

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though temporarily embarrassed was soon at his ease. But he found himself wondering why Clemencia had given him that quick, frightened look.

"There," he said, to relieve the strain, "I stood watching the widespread beauty before me. There lay Santa Barbara bathed in the pure riches of the sun."

"It speaks well for us that you could have any admiration left for our little town," laughed Mrs. Helton. "I should think that your eyes would have been surfeited with the beauties of the pass."

"I must admit," he answered, "that white crowned peaks and foaming waterfalls are enchanting. But look! Those green trees which gleam like emeralds in the sunshine — tell me, are they not wonderful, too?"

"I think I love the deep canyons of the Sierras better than any other view," Clemencia volunteered.

"But the lower passes have also a great charm. Where will you find a lovelier view than this?" asked Mrs. Helton. "See, ridge and valley below us, stretching out in marvelous beauty of roughened ground or cultivated land to the blue waters of the Pacific!"

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"I grant all that," the girl answered, "but the Sierras hold a solemn, ineffable beauty. The deep silences, the strange tones found in the heart of the mountains cause one to forget the world and fill one with an exhilarating gladness."

What a fine wilderness was revealed as they crossed the range! The Casitas is not a high pass, but even were one possessed of the coldest nature he could scarcely fail to fall under its spell. It gives bewildering impressions of long curves, high peaks and blooming underbrush and it stirs the soul to a sense of its beauty.

The little party did not lack enthusiasm. Coursing along in the fleet-flying automobile, the bright spangled light falling about them, they seemed to be floating through an enchanted world. Leaving the pass they descended rapidly, soon reaching Ventura and the open sea.

Here the mission and the whole country around it were full of reminiscences of Ramona and her sheep-shearing ranch.

Again there was a long stretch of gardens, streams, and glimpses of misty mountains; then once more a picturesque mission and San Fernando.

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Once as they neared a desert tract Mr. Helton called out from his seat beside the chauffeur:

"Look, Barrington, look at those two palms!"

Glancing in the direction indicated the young man saw two date palms, erect as sentinels, guarding the entrance to that vast stretch of golden sands. Their size was unusual even in this country of large palms, and their trunks, looking like huge pineapples, held aloft the colossal leaves curving and swaying like ostrich feathers.

"Are they not wonderful?" said Clemencia. "I always think of the fairies when I see them. Their bending green branches hide all sorts of beautiful things I am sure."

"It seems marvelous to me," responded Barrington, "that here on the edge of the desert, where nothing endures, such a thing of beauty is born. Your thought of the fairies must be correct, for these palms seem enchanted princesses in their glittering emerald-green dresses."

"Men talk of the solitude and the desolation of the desert," said Clemencia, "but there is a strange fascination about its loneliness and it is always a splendid sea of color. The greens, golds, and blues of the mountains, the pale topaz sands,

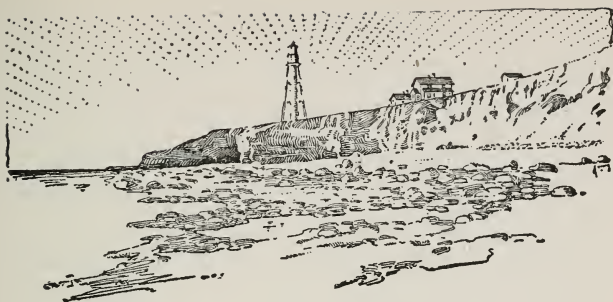
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the white clouds overhead all are past description. Then at noon comes that Midas touch of golden haze over it all."

"Clemencia sees wonders in the desert always, Lieutenant Barrington," interpolated Mrs. Helton. "To me it means only a wavering heat of mirage and sand, not the least bit wonderful."

"You are always so exact, Agatha," smiled her companion. "Do you never see in that sea of sand the golden fire blazing? And have you never noticed at sunset the strange, opalescent lights which flutter over mountain and plain?"

"Indeed I have tried earnestly to see these marvels, Clemencia, dear, but the fairies are not generous to me. The best I can do is to acknowledge that the desert possesses no supernatural charms and that I am always glad to leave it."



CHAPTER XXII

THUS by easy stages, stopping at the missions as they passed, the little party accomplished in a few days what to Barrington seemed the most enjoyable trip he had ever known.

Sometimes he and Mrs. Helton sat for hours and talked. At other times Clemencia shared his seat, and while both were delightful companions the charm of the younger woman was different from anything he had ever known.

Mrs. Helton's conversation was the smart and scintillating kind that prompts ready response, while Clemencia's precluded the frivolous.

In this world of many echoes he found hers was a *voice*. Her opinions were worth while and her arguments most convincing, and once, after

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some expression that had particularly impressed him, he said:

"Miss Castellanos, in this day of free play — of individualism — I believe your wise counsel and persuasions would be genuinely beneficial to some of your sisters. I am serious when I say that you should talk to them."

In an instant Clemencia was silent. The personal trend of his remarks obviously troubled her. But her face betrayed perturbation rather than annoyance. She caught him eyeing her keenly, and nervously aroused herself to reply.

"There are many reasons, Lieutenant Barrington," she said quietly, "why I could never have a voice in public matters."

"You are too modest," he insisted quickly. "Every woman has the right to express her convictions if she has the ability to support them."

Clemencia's long lashes drooped. She made no further reply and somehow Barrington, too, felt no desire to push the subject. There were times like these when her very presence seemed enough. And her moods of silence were contagious.

Her beauty, too, appalled him. The color in

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her cheeks, in her hair, her wonderful dark eyes flecked with sparks of fire were fascinating, and the heavy lashes which lay against her cheeks made their ivory tint more lovely.

Sometimes she sat quietly, looking out across hill or mesa, with only a faint flush warming her face and revealing her delight at the view. She looked so pure, so aloof, as if she might have been a priestess of some old temple. He felt a wild desire, there on the public road, to enter the lists and fight to keep her forever with him.

As they talked they sped along through the beautiful rolling country. The mountains in blue shadows, with misty, white clouds hovering about them reared their lofty heads to the left. To the right were spread gardens, orchards, and vineyards in every stage of cultivation, and before them lay a long stretch of the road like a slender brown ribbon.

The eyes of San Diego were turned seaward. The long-expected fleet, through roughened seas, had rounded the Horn and in majestic array was entering the beautiful harbor of Coronado Beach.

What feeling is there like that inspired by these

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dun-colored symbols of a nation's power? It is not patriotism; not the hectic elation we feel for countless uniforms and the martial tread of countless feet; not the joy that springs from tingling brass. The army *looks* and *sounds* power and the navy *breathes* it. Battleships are silent monitors of sovereignty!

If you have ever seen these ships stretched out in single file, like some impregnable Gibraltars of the sea, you have felt that dull sense of helplessness and oppression. They are the quintessence of power.

Barrington had reported to the commander of his squadron and remained aboard his ship until the fleet was sighted. Then his duties, as master of ceremonies ashore, took him back to the Heltons and Clemencia. They had not seen him for two days. On the morning of the third he joined them and they motored early to Point Loma.

Through glasses they watched the skillful maneuvering of the ships on their entrance into the harbor. Nearer and nearer they came, and then, amid the booming of cannon, sounded an answering echo from the assembled thousands.

There followed the generous hospitality of

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California — receptions, banquets and the pretentious gathering in the ballroom of the Coronado Hotel.

A brass railing set off the big floor for the dancers, and beyond this on soft, luxurious carpets were the easy chairs and card tables for chaperons and less energetic if not less loyal participants.

Flags and banners fluttered everywhere, admirals and precocious lieutenants danced or idled side by side.

Barrington, as a matter of course, spent the greater part of his time with the Heltons' party. He had already danced twice with Clemencia, and he had to be a prodigious tactician to accomplish that, for no feminine contributor to the evening's joy was in greater demand. Her singular type and unusual beauty drew their toll.

Admiral Thomas, who had succeeded to the command of the fleet when illness held "Fighting Bob" Evans at Magdalena, claimed his share of Miss Castellanos' attention, and there were many "seconds in command" who did likewise.

But Barrington, in his full regalia, was not to be ignored. If there was any match for Clemencia

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in that spacious room it was he, and that was a fact that did not pass without comment. He was dancing with her for the third time when suddenly, offering fatigue as an excuse, she suggested that they stop and step out to the balcony for a breath of air.





CHAPTER XXIII

ON the balcony Barrington felt the glamour of the night upon him. The music floated upward in a rapture of sound; through the open window he saw the brilliant uniforms of the officers, with their wealth of gold lace, and the jeweled gowns of the women as they swayed and moved in the dance. But Clemencia seemed oblivious to the sight. Her eyes were fixed on the long path of moonlight in the foam-tipped waves of the Pacific. Was it a silver pathway to the stars?

It seemed to the young naval lieutenant that they had suddenly stepped out of a passion-swept

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world into a misty life of dreams. Clemencia wore her hair piled high upon her shapely head. Her ivory-tinted face glowed with a light which rivaled the pale glory of the moon. From her filmy dress her matchless shoulders emerged as though rising from a fleecy cloud. Her long, white throat, her beautiful face framed in its nimbus of sunny hair gave her a singularly unearthly beauty. The costume she wore accentuated her slenderness and through her gloves he noticed her tapering hands.

As they stood listening to the strains of the waltz, however, her face was immobile. He wondered, too, why she veiled her eyes so steadily from him. But he saw that she was reluctant to talk and so he determined that he would not be the first to break the silence. At last with almost a sigh she smiled up at him.

"Thank you," she said softly. "Another would not have understood, but you have not spoken."

His heart bounded in gladness at the thought that she appreciated his conception of her mood. Her voice was full of subtle chords of music and she was addressing him again.

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"Sometimes I wonder," she said, "whether life here is not rushing to a climax. Can this turmoil which we call society, this mad excitement, go on forever?"

"Do you mean to suggest enchanting possibilities of greater pleasures or merely disaster, Miss Castellanos?" he asked lightly, trying to fathom her.

"Neither. But sometimes strange thoughts crowd upon me in the midst of gayety, and tonight I felt in there" — pointing toward the ballroom — "I felt as if I should smother unless I could escape."

She spoke with unusual feeling, and for a moment he was at a loss how to reply. She did not appear to notice this, however, and in a moment she continued in a troubled way:

"Lieutenant Barrington, do you believe that a promise sacredly given could ever be honorably broken?"

For a moment his diplomacy deserted him. Was it possible that she meant to speak of her engagement? But, no. Before he found his voice she continued hurriedly. "I mean if one believed firmly in something all one's life and then found

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it only a delusion, would that be sufficient reason to desert a cause, to refuse to take a step which others insisted was right? ”

Barrington's thoughts were rushing quickly, but as quietly as he could he commanded his voice to slow utterance.

“ If one was sure that the cause was worthy I should say no. But if the delusion, as you call it, were personal, could one honestly be a judge of the cause? ”

Her eyes opened widely for an instant in surprise as she replied:

“ Oh, yes! Of that there could be no doubt. There is merit in the cause, unquestionably so. But if a personal note entered — say, for instance, the happiness of one person alone became involved — ought one to temporize with duty because of that? That is the question I meant to ask.”

He was quite sure now that she referred to her engagement, but he dared not tell her what he understood. She was unhappy, he had long known that. But since she had so veiled her question, had been so guarded in her speech, ought he brusquely to show her that he knew the truth? No. If she chose generalities he would stick to

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them also. Any personal note in their conversation on that subject must come from her. But his temples throbbed and his blood was rushing madly. She did not love Sanchez. Why did this thought give him endless joy? He felt that he would be willing to lift mountains to gain a closer insight into this woman's heart.

Why tonight of all nights, at the most brilliant social affair of the season, had she chosen to tell him even this much? Why had she let him catch a glimpse of her unrest? Was it that the spirit of this wonderful California night had caught her as it had caught him? Did she feel the sea air like iced wine tingling through her veins? Was nature whispering to her as it was to him through every blade of grass frosted with silver? Could she hear ever and anon faint voices telling her that the world was splendid and that youth was glorious and that they two alone were listening to these secrets? He leaned toward her, his face glowing, though in the clear moonlight she could see that his eyes were grave.

"Miss Castellanos," he said seriously, "I cannot judge absolutely upon a subject of which you choose to tell me so little. Naturally, an honor-

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able man or woman will not repudiate a promise. But I do believe that certain promises are rashly made and should be retracted. May I tell you a little story to illustrate what I mean?"

She nodded.

"It is hard to begin," he said brusquely; "harder than I thought, because until tonight I have never told it to anyone. But somehow I feel that I must tell it to you. I once stumbled accidentally upon a great tragedy. I saw a woman, young and unmistakably beautiful, bowed down with such woe as I hope never again to see. She was grief-stricken to the depth of her soul, and I believe all through a mistaken view of life. She would have been very happy. She chose to be miserable."

Clemencia put out her gloved hand suddenly and caught at the railing. He was surprised to see how it trembled.

"Shall I go on?" he asked softly, observing her agitation at his words, "or would you rather that I did not?"

"Oh," she said faintly, "do not stop. I am much interested. Who was the woman?"

"That I do not know. She was a Catholic

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nun, or rather she was a *novice*. She was still free to choose the world, for she wore the white veil of her convent. For some reason she was quitting her cloister. That much I easily guessed."

He went on to relate his experience on the pass near Santa Barbara, but finally said: "In spite of the fact that the sudden sorrow which I accidentally witnessed was too tragically pathetic to be aught but real, instinct told me that it was unnecessary grief. That woman, with the wealth of golden hair, was utterly crushed by some *fancied* woe. She had no right to suffer as she did. Of that I am convinced."

"But you did not see her face!" she said excitedly. "You say she did not speak to you! How could you know?"

"True. She spoke not. But I touched her hands and they spoke plainly. The thrill of her soft, pliant fingers gave me the mystic sense of her life. I knew as surely as I know that I stand here that my instinct is true."

Clemencia dropped her head suddenly upon her hands, but at his exclamation of alarm that she might be ill she lifted it and said faintly: "No, but your story has affected me, I admit. You

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speak so strangely, so authoritatively. Why, what could a woman's hands say? "

" I don't know," he answered slowly. " Call it the sixth sense, explain it as you please. But they did speak to me, eloquently, appealingly. They asked me for help so plainly that I could scarcely keep from crying out the answer, and I have wished a thousand times since that I had done so."

" And her hands told you all of that? How strange! " She laughed softly, but her laugh was not genuine. He detected the false note in it, and when he spoke again it was in a sterner tone.

" Yes, *Senorita*. They told me all that and more. It was not alone that her hands were beautiful. There was character in them. They showed that her life could be great and full of power. A woman with such hands had a right to a life of her own choosing, a life full of beautiful things designed and carried out by a superior mind." Then after a pause he continued: " Forgive me if I have moved you by my sad story, but the nun's pitiful tragedy touched me suddenly, vitally.

" You are like that nun, Miss Castellanos.

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Your own life you can make or mar. A single misstep may be fatal. That novice was probably no older than you in years, but, alas, her life lay all behind her. Can you, at your age, face life and live through the endless years, reaching out even into eternity, through any mistaken sense of a promise rashly made? Forgive me if I speak earnestly, but I have watched you closely. You are not happy. You make me think of that poor novice, weeping in the dust. My resolutions to ask no questions are failing me now. I would prize your confidence as I would my soul."

He had spoken breathlessly, hurriedly, for his emotions almost overpowered him. Now he awaited her answer.

She was as pale as death, but when his appeal ceased she rallied and regained her composure. There was hauteur in her voice when she spoke again. It was cool and had lost the soft timbre of her confidential mood. She was again the woman of the world, indifferent, smiling and courteously distant. The crucial moment had passed, and it struck the man with bitter force that she had resented his personal note, showing him plainly that she resented his question. No

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amount of masculine endurance could bid him rise above the situation, or pretend indifference to her change of manner. He bowed silently and offered her his arm.



CHAPTER XXIV

ONE sunlit morning a few days later San Diego was shocked by news of a tragedy in the strike-ridden district near Santa Barbara. An explosion had occurred in the power-house of the line which was an adjunct to the railroad managed by Mr. Helton. The usual warning had failed to come and three men had been killed.

Helton knew that the subsequent investigation would require his personal attention, and as Barrington's immediate activities in behalf of the fleet had been about completed the party of four set back toward Santa Barbara that afternoon at racing speed.

In this particular outrage Mr. Helton was unusually concerned. One of the young men who had lost his life had been a protégé of his, a young man whom he was educating and fostering for a bigger work. His distress was communicated to Barrington, and the young officer expressed a

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keen desire to assist in ferreting out the persons who were really responsible for the disaster.

By the time they had finished their journey a dozen or more arrests had been made and feeling ran high. But the suspects were as stoical as ever. Barrington had been with Helton all the morning on the first day of the official investigation. At luncheon he was approached by a messenger whom Helton recognized as an employe at Senor Castellanos' Santa Barbara office.

The note proved to be from Miss Morro, the young secretary, and urged Barrington without fail to meet her at 4 o'clock in the canyon back of the San Isidoro Inn. The lieutenant did not relish the appointment. He construed it as something pertaining to her personal relations with Sanchez and determined to make known his reluctance in this matter in no uncertain terms.

When he reached the appointed place the girl came toward him quickly. He was shocked at her appearance. She had lost the air of bravado which he had always associated with her, and her face, pale and haggard, revealed unmistakable suffering.

"Thank you for coming, Senor," she said.

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"Senorita, I came because you asked me, but, indeed, this affair between you and Senor Sanchez is not for me to consider. I feel that this must be our last interview upon the subject."

"You said you would help me, Senor Barrington. Will you refuse it now?"

"It is not that I am not willing, but I see no reason for my interference."

"Oh, Senor," she exclaimed passionately, "there is no justice in Sanchez. He will not listen to me. Indeed, I am quite forgotten," and her voice became choked with tears and almost inaudible.

Barrington knew that Sanchez was a villain, but would it console the girl to tell her so?

"In one breath I hate him, Senor, and feel that I will confront him with the proofs of his criminality in my possession. But in the next I love him and cannot bring myself to betray him."

"Senorita, you have spoken before of this guilt. Of what is he guilty?"

"I had intended to tell you on your return from Coronado Beach. But I cannot make up my mind to betray him now."

"Why, then, did you send for me?"

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"Even that I cannot explain without a betrayal of what under the circumstances I now think best to conceal."

"You have no thought of the right and wrong of the subject?" he asked gravely.

"I think only of the way it will affect him," she cried. "I would destroy all proof of his guilt if he would take me before the priest tomorrow."

"Miss Morro, you know that that is not an argument."

"I am no moralist."

"But you must have a conscience."

"Not where he is concerned."

The girl concealed her face with her hands and burst into tears. "Oh, Senor," she sobbed, "I am utterly miserable!"

"Come, come," said Barrington. "Perhaps after all you are exaggerating the importance of the affair. Since you will not let me help, though, speak to Sanchez. Tell him plainly to make a clean breast of things. That always goes a great way toward helping even the guilty man."

She looked up suddenly and her eyes glittered with tears.

"You hate him," she cried, "and though I

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came to you longing for your help I do not like your advice."

"True, I do not like him," replied Barrington gravely, "but I would try to be fair even with my enemy. My advice is sincere."

"Confession might hang him," she said, "and I will not betray him. No, Senor, you could not be really fair toward a man whom you hate. After all I shall trust only myself. I know that Sanchez is untrue to me," she added, "but I cannot tear love for him from my heart. It will be wiser for me to keep my own secrets."

And so they parted, with Barrington none the wiser as to her real motive for summoning him, but he was vitally more interested.

CHAPTER XXV

IT is fascinating to watch day by day the development of a human soul. One recognizes every shade of feeling from the slightest sense of depression to the greatest height of enthusiasm, and though Barrington was in a stage of dispassionate sympathy — so he himself declared — his emotional control was severely taxed. He was alive to the privilege of his acquaintance with Miss Castellanos. Their natures were congenial, and though their point of view was often widely dissimilar the fact only accentuated their interest in each other's presence.

What a lasting bond of love or friendship is this faculty for interesting argument. One cannot live on the heights forever and be nourished. Amiable disagreement makes familiar association truly delightful. Dull and witless conversation will pall upon the most devoted couple.

A man of any sentiment whatever cannot be thrown into companionship with a charming

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woman without feeling some interest in her. He need not, necessarily, be in love, but to sit with her hour after hour in the sun-sweetened air of California and not succumb to her charm would prove him bloodless. Though Barrington believed his affections were well under control he did not deny that Clemencia was marvelously alluring. On the night of the ball he had been quite sure that he was about to look into her heart, quite certain that her bare soul was about to be revealed to him. But she had suddenly called it back.

As if by mutual consent the subject of her engagement was ignored. He could fight for his own in the open, could face her lover with a clear conscience if she were willing. But she had shown him plainly that she did not seek his interference. Unhappy as he believed her to be over her promise to this other man he could not flatter himself that he was the one to remedy her discontent. And no matter from what angle the young officer studied Clemencia she seemed always shrouded in her air of mystery. It was as if a halo enveloped her and she was unwilling for anyone to step within its sacred boundary.

Barrington for a man of his precision and

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hardy instincts was strangely softened by her words. One morning they were discussing life in its various phases. "Fate," said the officer, "is after all but a rose in the garden of life and its petals fall one by one for man. For some the leaves flutter lightly to the ground without confusion and there is no discord in their lives. But for others they scatter in storm clouds, carrying dark shadows as they go. But," he added lightly, "after all that I do not believe in those time-worn superstitions of bad luck for the owners of opals and pearls, do you?"

"Who really believes anything?" she smiled back. "Life is only a chapter of accidents and environments. Blood and instinct are inherited. The oversensitive, highstrung temperament, worked up to nervous tension, sees ghosts, while matter-of-fact, prosaic souls laugh unbelief."

"Not always," he retorted. "They say that instinct is only the refuge of the ignorant. But I know a man of superior intellect, a dabbler in science, and authority on mathematical problems, who once had an unheard-of experience. It was remarkable in itself, but peculiarly so because it happened to this particular man."

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As he spoke he bent over and plucked a spray of Cecil Bruno roses. Their eyes met as he raised his head and for a moment neither spoke. He leaned forward and dropped the flowers softly in her lap. She raised the tiny pink blossoms to her face, laying them across her cheek. Then she pinned them at her breast.

"Your friend's experience," she said quietly.
"What was it?"





CHAPTER XXVI

“**T**HE man,” Barrington began, “as I told you, was a calm and placid individual who was generally absorbed in his dry problems. He was nearing forty, had a charming wife and two daughters who were just entering their teens. At the time of this singular happening they were all with him in Marquette, Michigan, spending two weeks at a summer hotel.

“One morning at five o’clock he was suddenly awakened. Determining that it was too early to arise, he said: ‘I can still sleep a couple of hours.’ Almost instantly, however, he was conscious of a most curious sensation. He was not

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asleep, but it seemed to him as if his soul was slowly leaving his body, and gradually he saw himself distinctly, lying in his bed, peaceful and calm, while his conscious self, his spirit, was slowly rising.

“ He felt himself borne higher and higher until he was caught in a swift current of air. It rushed him along with tremendous speed. He could feel the tingling of the cold blast, but he had no sensation that was disagreeable. His only impression was that of bewilderment. Where was he going? What was to be his destination? He was conscious that he had no control over himself. He believed himself hovering somewhere between heaven and earth, but he felt powerless to resist.

“ Suddenly he saw in the distance an object advancing rapidly toward him. As it came closer he perceived it was a white-robed figure. Nearer and nearer it came until he could discern that it was a woman in a long white gown with clouds of loose hair floating about her. She was very beautiful and had a wonderful serenity of countenance. ‘ I shall never forget that face if I live a thousand years,’ he told me. ‘ In its pale, solemn beauty I would recognize it in heaven or hell!’

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" Looking squarely into his eyes as she passed him this spirit woman said: ' Twenty-six of us were drowned an hour ago off the coast of Newfoundland. I was the only woman.' So speaking she passed swiftly on.

" In a moment he was wide awake. It was then just five minutes after five. It had all happened in five minutes.

" At breakfast he related the experience to his wife and daughters. Of course, they called it a dream. It was so vivid, however, that though in a measure he shared their belief, he thought and spoke of it constantly.

" You can imagine the astonishment and dismay of this man and his family when a day later flaring headlines in the morning papers proclaimed a tragedy exactly of the kind I have just described to you. The details of the disaster were precisely the same as they had been pictured to this man. Twenty-six souls went down on a small ship — all she held — and the only woman aboard was the captain's young and beautiful wife.

" But the most curious part of the story to me is — why should my friend have had the fact communicated to him an hour after the disaster?

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He did not even know of the woman's existence. If the communication was psychic — and it could have been nothing else — why should a person have been selected who had never heard of these poor people, who had no knowledge of any kind about them?

“The type my friend represented made it a most remarkable case. The only possible explanation was that his soul did actually leave his body and was wandering in space when it came face to face with this girl victim as she was making her long journey; and just because they met, just because of contact and for no other reason, she told her story. No previous, no future connection was necessary.”

Clemencia's face showed varied emotions. She had sat immovable while her companion related his strange story. She saw that he awaited some response.

“It seems unbelievable,” she murmured, but her words belied her real feeling.

“I grant you that,” the young officer responded, “but it is true, and to all of us revelations have come that seem scarcely less marvelous.”

“But surely, Lieutenant Barrington, amid these

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flowers and sunshine you would not dare declare your belief in such tales! ”

He regarded her earnestly. A cool salt wind straight from the sea blew toward them as he leaned nearer.

“ I would and do,” he said firmly.

She paled and shifted her eyes from his in nervous manner.

“ Come,” he added in a more spirited tone, “ we are distressing ourselves with a mysterious and gloomy subject. It is scarcely in accord with the brightness of our environment. Let me tell you something more cheerful. I have arranged with Mrs. Helton for a long, glorious day in the mountains — the kind of a day you so love. But I must strike a bargain with you before I make you a party to this jaunt — ”

“ Really, Lieutenant Barrington,” Clemencia interrupted, “ I did not know I sought the honor.”

“ You haven't, but you will,” he laughed. Then, seriously, he continued: “ I want to ask you a question. It may be pertinent or impertinent, as you interpret it. Tell me, won't you, Miss Castellanos, why you so persistently evade discussion of such a subject as we have just brought up? ”

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A shaft of sunshine filtering through the heliotrope trees flickered across her face. He saw her pale and again he witnessed that refuge in reserve by which she always thwarted his attempted intimacies.

The same helpless feeling came over him as when, that night on the balcony, he had offered his arm while his heart beat angry defiance.

"Honestly, Lieutenant Barrington, I cannot even conjecture what you mean," she taunted.

The falsity of tone was obvious, while the strange solemnity of her manner impressed him, too. But he persisted:

"I have noticed, too," he stumbled on, "that you often enter into frivolous environment apparently against your will. Am I right in that observation?"

Her answer took him off his guard.

"You are," she said quietly. "You are a keen observer and in this case, at least, you are correct."

"You mean that you do not care for society as we have come to know that word?"

"Exactly that."

"Why, then, do you mingle in it?"

Her answer was baffling. "I thought everyone

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knew that," she said. "Chiefly it is because I will shortly see no more of it and of my friends."

"But surely marriage will not debar you from society!"

"Marriage!" she exclaimed. "Lieutenant Barrington, I have no thought of marriage!" Then after a momentary pause she added: "I think a curse would come upon me if I had."

Miss Morro's words! Why had this girl used them, too? He leaned toward her eagerly.

"You are not betrothed to Senor Sanchez then?"

The question brought Clemencia to her feet.

"A thousand times no! What on earth prompted such a question?"

His heart leaped with gladness. "But," he persisted, "surely, Mrs. Helton told me that you were."

"Impossible. You misunderstood her. My betrothal is not to him — not to any man." Her voice was low and tremulous.

"Not to any man?" he echoed, completely mystified. "Why —"

"It is to the church!"

The bright sunlight seemed to fade away.

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Though Barrington's brain was clear he breathed as if he were in a London fog. His eyes remained on her face so long that she flushed and stammered out some trivial question. He was unconscious of it, however. He did not even hear her.

It seemed to him that a thousand pin points were sticking in his heart and that he was being consumed by a great white heat. Later he became aware that she was expecting him to speak. A surge of compassion for her and for himself swept over him, but suddenly it vanished. In an instant he understood, and he cried hoarsely:

"You are the nun I saw weeping and of whom I told you that night on the balcony!"

She bowed her head, nodding a slight affirmative.

And so it was really she — the girl of his dreams and of his desire were one and the same!

Again he saw the green branches of the pepper tree and between the leaves the berries shining like drops of blood. He saw the white clouds above lying against the blue of the heavens. He saw again that wondrous veil of golden hair, covering the quivering body of a forlorn, unhappy woman.

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" You recognized me then? " he asked and his voice grew stern.

" Yes, I knew you from the first."

" And you deliberately concealed your identity, even when I told you the story of the nun, and allowed me to think that you were engaged to your cousin! "

" Why! " she cried, with rising resentment at his manner — " why, I see no reason why I should have told you."

" Good God," he said impetuously, " you see no reason. Is it possible a woman can be so blind as to what a man might feel? "

He was lashed into anger and his pride was outraged that she should sit so calmly before him after such a confession. But as he saw her look of half fear, half anguish as she listened his face grew less stern. Yielding to the impulse of the moment he seized the soft hands that lay so limply in her lap and drew her to him with a strong man's force. But the look that met his unnerved him and he quickly released her.

CHAPTER XXVII

THERE was no doubt that Barrington had found Clemencia's admission appalling. Life suddenly presented a new perspective. His whole spirit revolted at her quiet acquiescence to a rôle that was alien to her, but he aroused himself to as cheerful a viewpoint as he could summon.

"You're not bound yet," he reasoned, at another meeting, "and your hair is glorious."

"My vow is irrevocable," she said with dignity, ignoring his bold personality, and although he murmured an apology his heart stood still at her words.

"Irrevocable? Why?"

"Oh, not my vow to the church. A woman is free to return to the world all the years of her novitiate. The black veil alone cloisters her. But the pledge I made years ago to my grandmother is just as sacred, just as binding."

"No," he argued, "there you are wrong."

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Again I am taking up arms in the controversy. One vow is far less binding than the other, and I will prove it."

Her tale had been peculiarly solemn in its perfect simplicity. Her grandmother, lavishing love in her cold, unbending way, had painted to her the perplexities and snares of an unguarded girl in the world.

She had pictured to her what she might accomplish by her dedication to religion and to the romantic mind of the young girl it carried the thrill of mysticism. The glamour of this premature surrender of will had caused her to purge herself of all worldly desires before she was sixteen. Her grandmother, taking advantage of this youthful enthusiasm, demanded and received her oath to accept the spiritual.

Manuel Sanchez had fostered the thought in her, too, for the day of her immurement would mark the senora's gift of a fortune to him. She planned to give him a slice of her wealth before insuring the rest to the church, and this would be done only when Clemencia was safe in the convent.

This niggardly desire for wealth on Manuel's

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part had kept him closely in touch with the girl, fostering her devotion to the convent. But it had led to his own undoing, for he ended by loving her in his evil way, and of late had tried to persuade her to give it all up and marry him.

Mrs. Helton had seen Barrington's misinterpretation of her words regarding Clemencia's engagement, but she felt that unless the girl saw fit to tell him of her oath she would not. Therefore Barrington had easily made the mistake of supposing Clemencia engaged to her cousin.

Padre Galvez made scornful analysis of Clemencia's childish oath, but both women were unconvinced by his arguments, regarding the promise as binding. Educated along these lines, is it to be wondered that Clemencia acquired a certain exaltation of purpose and believed she could benefit humanity by her step?

Barrington was a Catholic with a pride in his Catholic ancestry that only a man of Irish blood could appreciate. But Clemencia's devotion and determination in this case somehow seemed bigotry. He was haunted by the memory of unrest he had so often seen in her eyes and in some inexplicable manner he felt sure she would escape if

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she could do so honorably. Dimly through the storm and stress into which her confession had thrown him his soul was fighting to reach her level. There face to face on the heights once more he would tell her the truth. The life she had planned was beautiful for many, but for her it was all unsuited.



CHAPTER XXVIII

OPPPOSITION to Clemencia's desire to become a nun, strange as it may seem, came from Padre Galvez. This holy man at the head of a great religious institution had been drawn to its life from firm convictions, and when he arose at dawn and followed his brethren into the chapel where he celebrated mass it was to begin a busy day. His brain was like a clear flame. It was filled with lofty thoughts inspired by his great mission.

To him his church was a badge, an ornament. The cross meant consolation for humanity. He was a monk, but there was no limitation of power in his strength. He was a leader of men. His word roused them to action and to better deeds. Padre Galvez saw that it was unwise for Clemencia to enter the convent at an early age, and he had said often to the senora that he was not sure that she should enter it at all.

“ I know the feminine heart in matters of doing

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penance," he said. "I know also how easily religious enthusiasm is fired. But Clemencia has had her standard thrust upon her."

"Even so," the senora retorted. "Do you not realize that she will be protected against the mighty temptations of the world?"

"No, I believe in the justice of God. He does not weigh our bad deeds against the splendid perfection of the martyrs' lives. He allows for our moral height and will judge us accordingly. In the world, loving and honoring her church, Clemencia could be as shining a light as the saintly nun."

"But," argued the senora, "Clemencia could do more good for the eternal church by going into the convent."

Padre Galvez shook his head.

"Not so. I am an old man. I live beneath the moldy walls my honored brethren built. Yet great as has been the work of these splendid priests for God, in my soul I feel that the woman who raises her children to glorify and honor Him is great, too."

Thus they argued the matter, and with usually the same conclusion. "If Clemencia is really

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destined to bear the cross I will gladly see her there," he said. "But she herself must choose the way."

The clang of the mission bells was music to Padre Galvez' ears. His work was dearer to him than life itself, but though the stains of time were deep upon his face he had not forgotten his youth. Looking back across the years the memories of those days were very beautiful. True it was so long now it seemed to him the white sea mist had crept in between to soften the view. But all his being responded to those memories. The fire of youth still echoed in his heart. And he was determined Clemencia should have her chance. This was why he would not allow her to begin her novitiate till she was twenty-one.

CHAPTER XXIX

FOR days following that scene in the garden Barrington discussed her religious zeal with Clemencia, but mostly from purely an abstract standpoint and often with a smile upon his lips. But of late he had once or twice forgotten his rôle. He could not always keep absolute command over himself, especially when he could see that distressed look in her eyes.

One night as he sat thinking he realized what the last few days had meant to him. In his splendor of love now revealed he was conscious only of a great gladness. So long as he believed that Clemencia belonged to another he would not admit it even to himself. But now in the knowledge of her worldly freedom his eyes were opened.

Young as he was, he had, like most men, experienced love's illusions. But, like breath on a mirror, they had disappeared quickly. But this was different. Clemencia was the one woman for whom he had waited, and now when he had found

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her the church — his church — stood between him and happiness.

He knew, of course, that in rare cases the pope had annulled the chains which bound a nun even after the veil had been taken. But he knew, also, that if Clemencia once stood before the altar and consecrated herself to God nothing on earth could tempt her to ask his holiness' aid. And yet with all this there was a song in his heart which seemed to uplift him and to say:

“Set her free! She does not understand the closing of her beautiful young life, and although in the convent she might never awaken, never come to know all that she had missed in the perfection of attained womanhood, why should not you be the Siegfried to awaken this Brunhilde with a kiss?”

If sleep came to him at all that night it brought no refreshment. His pulses throbbed to the beat of his heart during all the long hours of the night. Not until the gray streaks of dawn lighted his windows did he drop into uneasy slumber.

In the morning he recalled that it was the day selected for the long ride to Shepherd's Inn, from which, after supper, they were to make the return

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by moonlight. How joyously he had looked forward to this mountain picnic! But now it seemed that love and sorrow had come to him simultaneously and that fate had chosen the most cruel moment to reveal to him the secrets of his heart. Outside in the warm winter sunshine the birds were making delicious music. Wherever he looked beauty lay revealed. That wonderful charm which nature holds in the early morning hours for those who seek her took possession of him and gave him new strength. On the wings of all this color and beauty a message promising invisible power was borne to him, and it seemed that he knew already that the cry of his soul would be answered.

CHAPTER XXX

THE crisp morning air imbued their mounts with unusual zest, and somehow the Heltons' steeds seemed a little more energetic than the others. They led the way a hundred paces or so ahead of Clemencia and Barrington. The jolly party skirted the ranches with charming houses nestling among the orange, lemon, and apricot orchards. Pear trees white with foamy blossoms, peach trees with their tints of sunset pink fluttered on all sides. Occasionally they caught a glimpse of the mountains tinged with amethyst and the exquisite blue of the sky. A joyous little band they were. Now and then a melody arose from some particularly happy one, whose refrain would be echoed in chorus by the rest.

The dinner at Shepherd's Inn was fraught with the many pleasantries of the moment. Its conclusion and the waning of the day brought a gentler mood. Barrington suggested to Clemencia



Mountains tinged with amethyst and the exquisite
blue of the sky

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that they climb one of the cliffs for a better view of the setting sun. She assented, and presently they had gained the steep and stood upon a little platform of rock high on the cliff.

The girl's cheeks were like roses from the climb. She was hatless and her beautiful hair, looking as though it had been borrowed from the sun, crowned her low forehead in little rippling waves of light. She seemed to him the embodiment of perfect womanhood.

The man gained courage to speak. He argued for the greatness of the church. He spoke of the flawless life of the nun who is called to lead the life and of the mistaken zeal of those who ever enter it without the divine spark. He tried to show that among those the church claimed as saints many had sought the world, and that those spotless souls had not lowered their standards by entering its whirlpool. On the contrary, they had held the highest crowns as saints and martyrs.

"I believe," he said, "that with the abilities you possess and the wealth at your command, your work would be larger and of infinitely more value in the world you propose to desert than behind the doors of the convent you seek."

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"I do not agree with you," she replied slowly, "for I believe that in the world obstacles would arise to divert my purposes. My very intentions would be changed, wiped out as it were, and my purpose defeated."

He smiled grimly. "I have a strong suspicion that your argument would not stand in court. You would have a large sphere in the world. The rich soil in a woman's nature cannot be covered up with the rules and regulations of convent life and yet breed fertility for the needs of the world of which she had absolutely no knowledge."

"Perhaps it is not necessary that I should know. I shall have good advisers, and after all a woman, even in the world, must trust such."

"Not such a woman as you," he answered boldly. "At the risk of paying you a compliment, I must say that. But we are speaking too seriously to mince our words. Your future usefulness and activity depend upon yourself and no adviser. Moreover, in the convent your power of idealism would be killed. You could not rise to the heights an intimacy with current events would arouse. Your best efforts and energies would always be curbed."

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The girl was silent. Just the semblance of a frown passed over her usually unclouded brow. When at last she broke the silence she spoke in low, decisive tones.

"It is not pleasant to have your chosen idol abused as you are doing mine. But in your mad haste to decry the quiet of my cloister and uphold the devotion to the world you live in you give no hint of the minor caprices which absorb the hours there. You draw your picture of freedom and power, yet all that I have heard and seen there makes me fear for its slavish laws. It is only a change of masters," she ended gravely, "and I prefer mine."

"You talk unknowingly because you have been brought up in universal ignorance. There are subtle and imperative wants to be met in the world and true womanhood is crying out its needs. But, alas! few answer the call, and if women such as you fail their sisters in their hour of need what is to become of your sex?"

"No," she said, violently agitated and losing for the moment her self-control. "The career you paint could never be for me. I am too ignorant — too inexperienced. But even were I con-

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vinced that the world needed me, all these reasons are nothing before the overpowering one which has dominated me always, my bond, my compact, call it what you will. It cannot be broken."



CHAPTER XXXI

FOR a few minutes neither spoke, and it was Barrington's voice that broke the stillness.

"Is your grandmother, then, so unreasonable? In this day and generation no one has the right to bind another, and you, you surely are too sensible to keep a foolish, childish oath. You cannot compromise with God. If you know that you cannot be happy in the cloister you have no right to seek its shelter. You call me foolish to intrude, to interrupt a life like yours, dedicated to calmness and repose. Good God! Do you think that I have not fought a battle, too? To leave you to seek your own destruction when I know now that in your heart you hesitate? It is more than mortal man could promise."

"What right have you to assume that I hesitate?" she said, her face deathly pale.

He leaned toward her. His face became as white as her own.

"The right every man has who loves a woman

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and, loving her, knows her as I know you. I knew from the moment I saw you that you were unhappy. I thought it was because of your engagement to your cousin. I was confirmed in my belief of your unhappiness on the night of the ball, when for a moment you opened your heart to me. I have known it a hundred times since. Dare you deny it?"

She seemed really frightened, but she struggled for composure to reply. Her voice, when it came, was distinct and vibrant with anger.

"Lieutenant Barrington," she said, "you have talked to me as no one has ever dared to talk before, and I deny your right to question or to think of me at all."

But his passion equaled hers. He saw that at last he had touched her.

"I cannot reason whether it is right or wrong," he said. "I only know that my heart cries out for you — that I love you with every drop of blood in my body. And though you bar me entrance to your heart I still will not see you sacrifice yourself if I can prevent it. You cannot blast my love from your existence. It is a part of me, and though it may never become a part of

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you I would steal you from the convent itself to save you."

Clemencia was numbed by the violence of his speech. Yet, despite her horror, she was conscious that her own heart beat so loudly that she feared he would hear it. She felt his exhilaration. She knew he had read her rightly, had spoken the truth, and, like the primitive woman, her spirit took pride in his strength and power, and her heart leaped out to meet his. But outwardly she was calm. She would give no hint which would betray her; but he, fearing her protestations, said hurriedly:

"It is too late. I cannot draw back now and will not. I will fight to gain your love even in the face of your anger. And, Miss Castellanos, you have given me the right to fight for you."

CHAPTER XXXII

CLEMENCIA remained silent. Never before had she faced a man who was so moved and who so moved her. His intense manner and vehement words carried her along with him. At first she had been shocked, but now she was caught in the current of his feeling. At his last sentence she drew back as though she had been struck. In a voice scarcely above a whisper she said:

“ I do not understand. When did I give you permission to fight for me? ”

“ You once declared to me that you did not believe in mental telepathy, *Senorita*. Look me squarely in the eyes and make your denial now.”

Clemencia trembled violently. Barrington leaned forward and caught her arms in a nervous grip. She snatched away and said:

“ You speak in riddles — I do not sense your meaning.”

“ Are you sure that you do not? ”

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The girl stared at him blankly and seemed unable to reply.

Barrington, taking advantage of her silence, went on:

"Then listen — I will offer no explanation of what I am about to say to you because none presents itself to me. I will simply tell you facts. Three nights before I met you you appeared to me in a dream. You told me that you were in great distress and begged me to save you from some calamitous happening which seemed about to befall you."

Clemencia's face crimsoned and she covered it with her hands. She was silent.

He went on:

"I have often wondered whether you, too, had been conscious that you appeared to me in that dream. More than once I have referred to it. Each time your manner led me to believe that perhaps you already understood what I was trying to reveal. I shall conceal nothing now. I shall lay bare my heart."

Clemencia drew her hands away from her face. She haughtily threw back her head as if his implied compliment was distasteful to her, but her cheeks

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were colorless and her agitation was apparent. Barrington seemed not to notice it and under the stress of his feelings scarcely paused in his recital.

"Even before that dream, Miss Castellanos, you had already appealed to me for aid, although I did not at once connect the two experiences."

"You mean when —" she began. Barrington interrupted her quickly.

"I mean when, in the garb of a nun, you were kneeling in the dust and I helped you to your feet."

Clemencia broke out defiantly:

"No! No! I did not speak one word!"

"That is true," he interrupted rapidly. "You spoke no word, yet I am sure you were conscious of the asking."

The man expected a storm of denial, but it did not break. After a moment, in which Clemencia struggled to regain her composure, she spoke to him. Her voice was calm.

"You are right, Lieutenant Barrington. On that occasion I did ask your aid in just the manner which you have suggested."

"You were conscious, then, of making the appeal?" Barrington spoke sternly.

"I was conscious of doing so."

Clemencia's Crisis

"Then why have you practically denied it to me?"

"Because I was afraid."

"Of what?" he asked eagerly. "And why did you choose me, a stranger, to ask for help?"

"I cannot explain — I was desperate, I suppose. I had a premonition of disaster when the nuns left me. It seemed to me that I was surrounded by hateful, screaming harpies crying, 'Go back to the convent!' In my excess of terror and nervousness I broke down and at that moment you stood before me. My silent cry for help was impulsive. I willed that you should understand me. I knew that such things had been done and that sometimes wordless thoughts are exchanged between persons. And — and — that is all!"

The girl was pitiful in her distress. Barrington's heart yearned for her, and for a moment he wavered in his purpose. He did not wish to insist on further revelations, but how was he to help her if he spared her at this time? He felt that he had a right to demand more, and in spite of her evident distress he went on:

"You surely called me in the dream that night — did you see me as I saw you?"

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The girl humbly nodded an affirmative.

"Then before I met you at the Heltons' you knew of the dream?"

"Yes."

"I thought so," he answered. "It was telepathic!" There was a note of elation and triumph in his voice.

A great fatigue seemed to possess Clemencia, and when she spoke it was in a slow, tired voice.

"When I found that you had answered my first appeal, there on the edge of the desert, I realized that I possessed the power to call you to my side, and so I said to myself, 'I will tell him more tonight.' Therefore, after every one had retired, I went into the library and sent my imperative call to you."

"You saw me?"

"As well as I do at this moment. You stood before me and spoke to me."

"And with this miracle between us, this proof of a sympathy so deep that master minds cannot explain it, you dare deny me the right to answer those calls?"

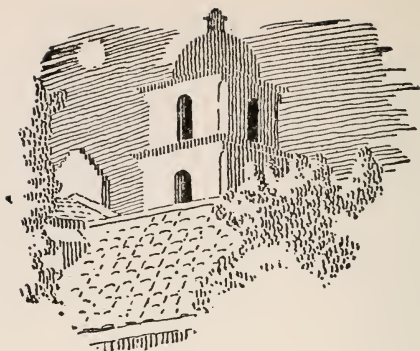
"Oh, Lieutenant Barrington," cried the girl, struggling for composure, "what does it all sig-

Clemencia's Crisis

nify? Only that in a moment of weakness I yielded to temptation, a yielding which I now heartily regret."

"It proves," he answered, "that you are about to make a terrible mistake. It proves that should you become the church's bride you will commit a crime, because you realize you were sincere both times when you called for help, and that your heart does not belong to the convent. I shall prevent you from this rash act in spite of yourself."

"No, no," she cried. The girl seemed shaken by the young officer's vehemence. She drew back in terror. "I have regained my strength. I will not yield to weakness again. I have chosen my life path and I forbid you to interfere."



CHAPTER XXXIII

THE friendship between Barrington and Padre Galvez was a source of much pleasure to both. Somehow the old padre always reminded the young American of the knights of old — those men who had fought to win or die. Interest between the two was strengthened by associations of the past. In her girlhood Barrington's mother had known and admired the young Spaniard who had become Padre Galvez. The elder Galvez, his father, had been an uncle of the King of Spain. He had held an important post at Madrid. The son, Ricardo, was twenty-seven years of age and already remarkable for his learning when he met Barrington's mother, then in the first flush of youth. But the spoiled

Clemencia's Crisis

and lovely girl had also a brilliant mind. She was quick to discern a kindred spirit in the young Spaniard. The latter recognized in the imperious beauty a worth far beyond the physical attraction which she undoubtedly possessed. Unconsciously they had been drawn together into a memorable intimacy. In those days, long ago, Maude Arslan had said to herself many times:

“Ricardo alone understands me, and it is because his love is not the love of man for woman; it is true comradeship; it will last forever.”

But with all her wisdom and acumen she had failed to know the heart of Ricardo Galvez. He loved her with a passionate but silent love. To the serious-minded young Spaniard nothing was so alluring as this audacious Irish girl, whose bewitching manners and beauty bewildered him.

Yet as strongly attached as Ricardo was to the girl, when he saw that she had given her heart to John Barrington he went his way and she never dreamed of the true nature of his devotion. But often, as he walked in the warm sunlight among the trees and flowers, he would see again, in retrospect, her face as she had once turned it toward him and whispered:

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"Ricardo, my only friend, I am so happy that you alone have understood my heart from the very first, because of our warm friendship. Even John has not understood so well."

Galvez had smiled courageously and kissed her hand, thanking God that she did not know his heart as he knew hers. Now, after all these years, he could truthfully say that the husband was not less dear to him than this white love of his youth. The coming of their son to him had touched the dry places in his heart, making them to bloom again with memories of the past.

Padre Galvez was too keen an observer of men not to see that Barrington's mind was weighed with some secret matter of import.

The two men were seated together on the balcony built around the mission turret. Everything was in readiness for the festival which Senora Castellanos was about to give for the entertainment of the fleet. Padre Galvez felt great satisfaction that the senora had been placated, for he knew that she could be relied upon to dispense true Spanish hospitality in her own home.

The sun, a red ball of fire, had sunk into the

Clemencia's Crisis

Pacific and in the east a faint star glimmered. The peace of the great night silence was approaching.

Barrington's voice at last broke the stillness.

"Padre," he said, "I am in dire distress. Would you help me if I needed your assistance?"

The old priest looked up in amazement, as if trying to grasp the full meaning of his friend's words. Then he said slowly and as though a little hurt:

"Can you doubt it, my son?"

Instinctively the priest had put out his hand. The younger man grasped and pressed it. Padre Galvez awaited Barrington's confidence.

"Padre, I may ask you for all the help that your words promise, for mine is a question which the church must decide."

The American got to his feet and paced restlessly back and forth as if to regain his composure. Finally he said:

"Padre, I love a woman." His voice was low and tense. "I love her with all the strength that is in me. I have reason to believe that she is interested in me, but there is a duel between us because she feels that it would be a sin to yield,

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so she is fighting me." Barrington ceased speaking. He nervously paced the balcony to ease the stress of his emotions.

The priest did not answer at once. When he did speak his voice was quite grave.

"Why does she feel so, my son? You are not bound?"

"No, padre, but she has made a mistake in her life. She fancies herself held by a vow and turns from me, refusing to free herself. Yet no bonds on earth shall separate us if I find that her heart is mine. Right or wrong, she shall belong to me."

The priest's face paled with anger and surprise. He arose and when he spoke his voice was sharp and thin and lashed like a whip.

"I retract the offer made a moment ago, sir. I spoke hastily when I promised to aid you."

Absorbed in his own thoughts and forgetting that he had not revealed the nature of the bond which held Clemencia, Barrington answered bitterly:

"If your God is a just God He will give me the woman I love. But even if the church refuses its blessing I shall bid her come to me without it."

Clemencia's Crisis

"You speak blasphemously, sir. You are no Catholic. No true son of the church would use such words."

The long, dark face of the priest showed pinched and drawn in the evening shadows. The expression in his eyes was the same as if a knife were being turned in his heart. He realized how he had idolized this young man, the son of the girl whom he had loved, and he thought he saw how far his idol had fallen. His words, though spoken in an even tone, were heavy with contempt:

"The bond of marriage is lasting forever and a day. Divorce never frees a Catholic man or woman. You cannot marry her and keep your church."

The two men faced each other in a tumult of distress. As they stood thus there flashed before Barrington's mental vision the luminous face of his beloved. Her pale beauty haunted him. He gave the priest look for look.

"Padre," he said, "I have misled you. The bond which holds the woman I love is not marriage."

"Not marriage?" exclaimed the astonished priest. "What bond then could separate you?"

Clemencia's Crisis

"Are there not other vows, my padre, which are held just as binding in the sight of our church? Oh, padre, trust me. I cannot tell you more now."

The priest grasped the hand extended to him, but he was puzzled. He could not understand. At that moment, however, the bell in the tall spire of the nunnery pealed forth. The priest suddenly thought of Clemencia, as he always did whenever the nuns came to his mind. His spirit was constantly troubled about the girl. Like an electric shock it flashed upon him. He knew, of course, of Arslan's friendship with her. He searched the young man's face anxiously, and as he did so his own lighted up with a strange, soft glow.

"The fancied bond," he questioned, "which holds this woman is a holy one, is it not?"

The American nodded. Padre Galvez's face was eloquent in its agitation.

"My son," he said, "there is no need to tell me her name; it is engraved here." The priest laid his hand upon his heart.

"Then, padre," Barrington said impulsively, "cherish it in that sanctuary as I cherish it in mine, and until she speaks let it be guarded well."

Clemencia's Crisis

"But, my son, why could I not aid you better if I spoke?"

"Not yet, padre. She is not yet ready to hear the truth from you."

Reluctantly the priest signified his consent to silence. His arms went affectionately across the young man's shoulders.

"If your faith be as great as a grain of mustard seed you can move mountains. If you win her you will gain a wonderful soul to cherish your life long through, and the blessings of the holy mother church will be yours."

That night Padre Galvez knelt in the sanctuary of the mission. He lit two candles and stayed through all the hours that they burned. In his heart the good old priest was saying exultantly:

"Her son is a knight of King Arthur — he is straight like a cedar of Lebanon — straight and strong. He is worthy of her."

CHAPTER XXXIV

PERHAPS the prime requisite for a successful career is adaptability. Unless one can adapt one's self to change much suffering lies along and at the end of the road. Often if grave and serious matters are determined upon in early youth we find later these principles have assumed the grotesque.

But Senora Castellanos was not adaptable; she was of another time than the present; nor was she of those women who shape events to their own ends. The senora was an old-school Spaniard to the core. Her hatred of all things American was proverbial among those who knew her. Added to this national dislike, which was ingrained in the old dowager, was that closer and more personal hatred which centered about the tragic life of her beloved daughter, Clemencia's mother.

Small wonder, then, that the good residents of Santa Barbara were deeply surprised when they

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learned that the Senora Castellanos had consented to open her magnificent grounds and her home for a fête in honor of the American fleet.

But though the acquaintances of the senora knew of her hate for men and things American, they did not guess of the poison of her rancor. Not even Padre Galvez, who was her confessor, knew, and often as the old priest paced his pillared cloister, reading his breviary and meditating upon the evanescence of earthly things, he sighed sadly as he thought of the stern old woman and of the girl who was her grandchild. More than once the padre and the Senora Castellanos had spoken on the subject of Clemencia.

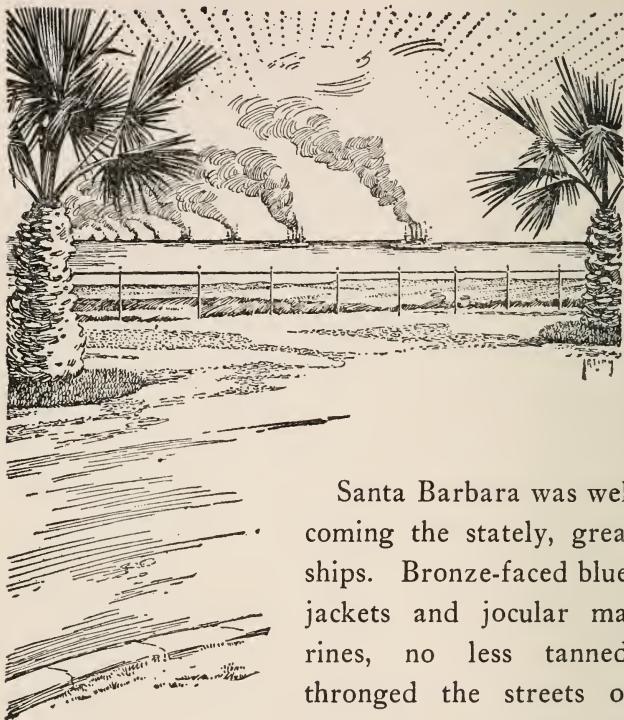
"It is not true," he had said on one occasion, "that God always demands sacrifices from his elect."

To this the senora had answered:

"But these are the impressionable years — the years during which she should learn the sterner side of life."

"Nay," said the priest, "I would rather see Clemencia less serious-minded and more taken by those frivolities which are natural to a girl of her age."

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Santa Barbara was welcoming the stately, great ships. Bronze-faced blue-jackets and jocular marines, no less tanned, thronged the streets of the California city. By day and by night processions bearing banners on which were written welcoming legends paraded the wide thoroughfares.

This was the night of the Senora Castellanos' festival. Very regal she looked as she stood with her granddaughter to receive the guests in the

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large reception hall which ran the entire length of the *patio*. Her hair, snowy white, was drawn simply back and without adornment. Her black dress was relieved of somberness by trimmings of priceless lace. The old woman's darkly patrician face and her vivid black eyes lent her the appearance of some aged yet still vital empress who gave audiences to those who paid her fealty.

Clemencia, like a slender lily, jewelless, stood beside her. In her simplicity she was strikingly beautiful. Her garments, like the morning mists, were filmy white, but she stood in them like Phoebe emerging from the clouds. Manuel Sanchez, the nearest relative, was there also. At the senora's request he was dispensing hospitality as man of the house. Handsome in his dark, daredevil way, he mingled with the guests and was conspicuous wherever he went. Near by Padre Galvez, dignified and courtly, held his coterie, and the few priests present, coming and going in their dark gowns among the gayly dressed women and gold-braided officers, seemed to add to the charm peculiar to that wonderful valley of California.

There is no more courtly class in the world

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than the cultivated Spaniard. Padre Galvez and his hostess each showed the marks of gentle blood in their bearing, though they represented widely dissimilar types. Clemencia was representative of still another type; the blood of a younger and more virile race flowed warmly in her veins.

The grandmother, perhaps, was the most strongly individualized of the three; and yet the austere calm face of the padre was one to remember. In it shone the light of a great spiritual happiness, a happiness which clothes only those who give their lives for others. He believed that the real workers of the human race, hearing the cry of destiny and pushing onward with heads erect, will in time overcome all obstacles, because, above the silence of the stars, their work is planned, and that some day, the great work at last accomplished, we shall reach the peaks of wisdom.

The echo of laughter and merry talk was everywhere. It seemed as if some gay magician had waved a mysterious wand over the house and grounds of the Castellanos. All about the place were hung innumerable little Chinese lanterns, and above the open and wooden-floored tents for the

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dancers fluttered vivid pennants. Soft-footed servants glided in and out among the guests.

A number of festivities had been planned, but the feature of the evening would be the dancing of a bevy of Spanish girls and their partners in the *patio* at ten o'clock. The dance would end all entertainment save the dancing of the guests. A hush fell upon the crowd when promptly at the time the four dancing girls entered. They were followed by four young men. The girls wore brilliant yellow gowns with trimmings of gold, and represented priestesses of the Sun God. The dress of the men was of the same color, with sashes of red, symbolizing the fiery beams of the sun. All of them carried sunlike disks as shields.

They began a weird and curious dance, with graceful and intricate figures representing ceremonies sacred to the Sun God.

In and out the gayly appareled dancers trod to the measure of music that sometimes spoke in low tones of passion and sometimes sounded trumpets of battle.

Barrington had never before witnessed the Sun dance. He found that it stirred him strangely, and he wondered just how fine the line is that

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separates the so-called love of culture and civilization from the savage.

The young naval officer was quick to discern that the one whom he loved was also deeply moved. She stood at some distance and on the other side of the dancers from him, but in her heightened color, her glowing eyes and the quick tapping of her right foot on the floor he read other emotions than those which are welcome behind the peaceful doors of a nunnery.

Quick and hearty applause marked the end of the dance, after which the *patio* was deserted for the pavilions.

Barrington and Clemencia had taken but a few steps of an intoxicating waltz when he drew her out of the pavilion. In silence they walked to a distant corner of the grounds where the artificial lights could not disturb a clear view of the night.

There they found a bench and rested upon it. There was no moon and the constellations looked larger, more luminous, while the air between seemed to twinkle in purple lights. Barrington spoke softly.

"The whole of nature seems to change under the sheen and sparkle of the sky jewels."

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Clemencia sighed. "No tongue or pen can tell the glory of the heavens," she answered.

"True," he said. "Yet looking once into that dome of blue with its jeweled tapestry, even though he should never see it again, the soul of man could never forget."

"I feel as you do. Those tiny curtains of flame fluttering between dusk and dawn have no match in the whole universe for charm and mystery."

The vastness and the beauty of the night was upon them both. It was the first time for several days that they had been alone. The man in him was crying to be heard. He could not neglect this opportunity.

"Miss Castellanos," Barrington's voice was very soft and pleading, "I frightened you the other night by my vehemence. I entreat your pardon. My feelings carried me to the point of selfishness. I wished to convince you by reason that you had no right to become a nun. I failed utterly because the personal note was too strong."

"Why is it," she answered in a cool voice which ignored a part of his sentence, "that you persist in saying that I have no right to become a nun?"

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"I will tell you," he said, his voice gaining strength. "You have no right to become a nun because deep down in your nature you realize that you were bound by a promise before you understood the import of the oath that you took, and because, though once ignorant and therefore happy, you have now awakened to the seriousness of your vow. There is in you now a dumb protest. You know now that you will not be content in a nunnery. Is it not true?"

Barrington's eyes were full of fire as he spoke, and Clemencia shrank from his gaze. Her mind was a chaos of wild thoughts. What was this elemental tumult within her?

With a pang of fear the girl sensed that this man's argument carried a dangerous appeal. The fear was not lessened when she found that his viewpoint did not outrage her own feelings.

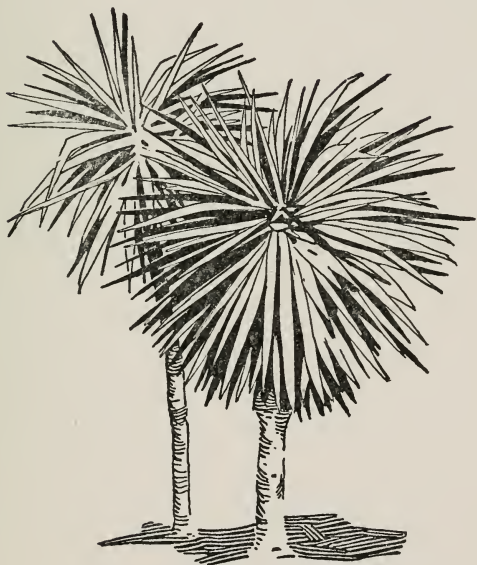
What if, after all, she were only a religious fanatic? But her grandmother — surely her grandmother, who loved her best, was right. This man spoke only out of his own worldly wisdom.

"You are mistaken; I am quite free to choose. No one compels my choice."

Clemencia's color was heightened and her

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breathing was rapid, but she looked straight into Barrington's eyes with an undisturbed glance. The man gazed back at her and voiced a little laugh.



CHAPTER XXXV

“**H**OW can you call it freedom when all of your youth has been weighted with this one hideously tyrannous thought — the thought that salvation may be gained only through the cloister?” demanded Barrington. “Your grandmother is a remarkably clever woman and no doubt she loves you deeply, but she is prejudiced and creed ridden. She believed that only by this spiritual bond could you be brought not to your God but to hers. Therefore she has systematically spent her days in attempting to convince you of this. In her mistaken zeal for your seemingly imperiled future she has bent her energy toward making you believe what she told you. Small wonder, then, that she has succeeded. Miss Castellanos, do not think for a moment that you were ever free to choose. Every corner of your mind has been crammed with your grandmother’s logic. Every enthusiasm of your youth has been

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directed to her purpose. Your spiritual slavery has been complete."

Barrington paused a moment. The girl took advantage of the interval in his talk and began speaking.

"Granting that all this is true — what difference does it make? Padre Galvez insisted upon my knowledge of the world. Am I not free to choose now?"

Barrington's words had made her uneasy and she spoke in quick, staccato sentences. The man leaned eagerly toward her.

"You must make me a promise," he said sternly. She noted that he did not answer her question.

"Must?" she queried. A signal of danger was in her voice, but he ignored it.

"You must swear to tell Padre Galvez that I love you," he said quickly.

"I am afraid you overestimate the importance of the fact," she answered. "It would do no good, anyway — the padre cannot influence my determination."

"It is not the padre who will decide your future," said Barrington.

Clemencia's Crisis

" Pray, then, if not he, who can influence me? "

The man's face was as white as death and his eyes blazed as he answered:

" I."

She looked bravely at him, though she trembled.

" What right have you, Lieutenant Barrington? " she exclaimed.

" Because — because I love you. Is that not enough? " he whispered, making a movement to take her in his arms. She leapt to her feet. Barrington stood almost as quickly. His blood was beating madly like little drums in his ears. He was dizzy with the vision of her as she stood in the night's warm glow. Never before had she seemed so desirable to him. His eyes drank her in. He noted with a throb in his throat that she was trembling violently.

The man took a quick step toward her. He held out his arms.

" Don't — don't — " Clemencia pleaded unsteadily, while his low, glad laugh broke on her hearing. He gathered her close and crushed her mouth against his own. She lay panting against him.

" I love you — I love you — " he began bro-

Clemencia's Crisis

kenly. "Give yourself up to the truth and then swear that my kiss is distasteful to you if you can!"

Speechless, she lay against him while he murmured soft words of endearment. Then he released her; she stood white and silent. Clemencia felt as though she had passed through the gates of death, but she knew that she had caught a fleeting glimpse of heaven.

He was speaking to her again, and his voice had not lost its vibrant note of passion, yet a new tone was in it — a tone earnestly calm.

"From the time I was old enough to reason," he said, "my whole life has been directed toward freedom. Like you, I determined that my life should be as I willed it. The thought of bondage has always been distasteful to me. Yet all my determination avails nothing now, for you, beautiful in body and soul, have taken me prisoner. I reason with myself to no purpose. I know myself conquered, beaten, because I see only you. In the mists of the morning you rise to greet me like Aurora. At night in my dreams you are with me. This is no news to you, because you know it. Yet you would ruin my life."

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"It is too late," she said dully. "I cannot retract now."

"Not even when you know that you are crushing life out of me?" he asked, hoarse with feeling.

"Not even then," she said slowly. "I dare not draw back now."

"My feelings are not enough, then?" he said bitterly. "What if there were another — a stronger reason?" he ventured.

"There could be none," she replied, "at least none that I could consider," but she avoided his eyes uneasily.

"There is one," he persisted. "One that you cannot thrust aside lightly, the strength of which far outweighs all your arguments."

"I cannot listen longer," she said hurriedly. "I'm doing the best I can — the best I know how with my life. You seem bent on making it hard."

But he was inexorable. He came a step closer.

"I'm making it hard on purpose," he said, and he noticed her agitation with a feeling of exultation. "You deny all that I say. You fight me at every approach. Yet the reason I offer is

Clemencia's Crisis

too potent to be ignored even by you. It is the fact that you love me and that I have just discovered it."

He expected denial, protestation, but to his astonishment she retained her composure. She had reached a stage when the simple truth without reserve did not startle her. But even in the starlight he could not miss the hot color flaming in her cheek and brow as she turned and faced him.

"You might have spared me that at least," she said slowly, "but since you will have it — yes, I admit it."

He seemed to grow straighter, taller, but he made no reply.

"Perhaps it is true that I do love you," she was saying, "but if I married you now it would seem that I had deserted a higher sphere for a lower one and had done it deliberately."

"Not if you love me —"

She withdrew her eyes from him, but he could see that she was struggling with her emotions. It was one of those moments when it is difficult for a woman to keep her self-control. But she was strong and the boundary line was not yet crossed. It steadied his own tingling nerves to

Clemencia's Crisis

watch her as he waited eagerly for the answer on which their destiny seemed to wait.

" True marriage implies more than love. That alone would not make us happy. If I were untrue to the greatest principle of my life — the higher object I have sworn to reach — could we ever be content? Would not the feeling that I had lowered my standard — that I had probably sent my grandmother, who has sacrificed all her life for me, to the grave heartbroken because of my failure — rise always like a skeleton between us? "

" No! No one's life can be laid out in advance for him or her by someone else. You are not responsible for what has happened during the last two months. Nor am I. If I have come between you and the convent, remember that I have suffered as much as you in doing so. It would be sacrilege for you to become a nun now because of the feelings you harbor. You belong to me! "

She thrilled with a curious sensation of joy as she listened to his words yet answered:

" In consecrating her life to God it is not unusual for a woman to give up her dearest ties. I should only be one of many."

Clemencia's Crisis

“ Ah, yes. But there is a difference. She gives them up *willingly*. In your case it is desecration. You are unwilling, and the fact that I know it and that I, too, am unwilling makes it a crime. Beloved, I claim you. Listen to your own heart. You are bound to me forever and *I have not the slightest intention of giving you up.*”

Moved by his persistence, she continued: “ You say that the last barrier has gone down between us. To me it seems that you have only built new ones. Because I have departed from the principles of my life for a while and have allowed you to make love to me is no reason why I should forswear those principles entirely. I would hold myself the worst woman alive if I should be so weak.”

He stood motionless and did not answer. Curiously enough, he gloried that this woman in the glow of youth and health and with love beating at her heart could still deny it entrance. Her determination to fight him mattered little. *Now* that he knew her heart he would simply take her — more forcibly, perhaps — but, willing or unwilling, she belonged to him!

CHAPTER XXXVI

THERE comes a time to all the sons and daughters of men when alone and unsupported they must face life. The manner in which this crisis is met shows the true measure of character. These crises are not unlike the last great ordeal of death; they who love and who are loved may not give comfort in the hour of agony. And so it was with Clemencia; she faced her crisis alone.

After leaving the dancing pavilion the girl went directly to her room. Her brain was clear now she saw that her temple had been built in sand and had fallen.

Clemencia knew that her hour was upon her, like the doe deer arrow-wounded; she knew that she must either emerge from the struggle with her hurt healed or with her spirit clothed in a stoicism which would defy the world. She flung on a kimono, unbound her long, golden hair and seated herself in a chair beside an open window, through

Clemencia's Crisis

which the cool night winds blew in from the sea. The sounds of laughter and music came to her from below, but the sounds seemed alien and remote.

Her temples were throbbing. The memory of Barrington's impetuous kisses still stung her lips and made her ashamed with a shame which carried with it a recompense of remembered delight.

The girl leaned her elbows on the window sill and wondered if her lover was seeking her below. The memory of his white face, his vibrant voice and his strong, eager arms ran through her like old wine. She lifted her eyes to the dusky, star-studded vault overhead. Somehow, though, the vision failed to give her ease. She wanted — she wanted his arms around her again, and she wanted again his lips upon hers.

Below stairs Clemencia heard the guests taking their leave. Still she sat silent in the window and nursed her new-found happiness. Of a sudden she left her seat by the window, snapped off the light, and slipped into bed.

As she lay quiet she admitted to herself that Barrington had spoken the naked truth. It struck her with a thought of horror that she could take

Clemencia's Crisis

no comfort from truth. She had believed that the truth could console in all extremities. She was now learning that the truth also might flay the spirit with scorpion whips.

Every word that Barrington had uttered during their interview beside the rustic seat was burned into her brain as by a white hot brand. His voice, the voice of *her man*, called to her to come, and its note was powerful with the primal urge of life.

Yet she fought to close her spiritual ears to this voice and to hearken only to the coldly solemn command of the mother church.

Over and over again the wild thought flashed into her mind: "What if I should stretch out my hand and snatch this new-found happiness in spite of all? Will it not recompense me for loss of all else?"

All night the spirit of Clemencia Castellanos was beaten and buffeted in a sea of indecision, but toward morning she fell into a troubled sleep, in which Barrington seemed to come again to her and with pale lips plead for his happiness.

The girl's slumbers were light and feverish. Shortly after dawn she arose and dressed herself. Without waiting for breakfast to be served in her

Clemencia's Crisis



room she descended the stairs and left a note on the library table telling her grandmother that she had gone for a horseback ride. She then made her way out to the stables, aroused a sleepy groom and a few minutes later was cantering off down the long white road that led toward the mountains.

She turned her mount's head toward the tall mountains that she loved so well. She felt instinctively that they would soothe her. The quick beat of a horse's hoofs, the wind blowing

Clemencia's Crisis

in her face, and the long, steady movement of the animal she rode seemed to quiet the fever in her blood.

A mile and a half from the *patio* she guided her horse out of the main road and along a steep path which ran its rugged way to the top of a high foothill. On the crest of the hill she halted her horse and turned to gaze out over the ocean, that eternally changing master worker in color. As far as she could see Clemencia's eyes caught glimpses of swift, white-tipped combers endlessly fleeing shoreward. Above her the wide branches of the pine trees chanted their eternal under song, which seems life itself made audible. From inland came the far, faint music of a waterfall, hidden among trees.

The valley which lay to the eastward from ridge to ridge was filled with golden light, save where now and then the shadows of sharp peaks pierced its loveliness. In the distance mission bells chimed to mass, but to the ears of the girl they sounded only as a part of the wonderful daybreak over Santa Barbara.

Bathed in the glory of the morning, the girl tried to forget everything but the marvelous pan-

Clemencia's Crisis

orama spread out before her wondering eyes. The world, with all its cares, life and its unsubstantial shadows of dreams, receded. Dimly she wondered if Moses had not felt thus, as on the peak of Nebo he caught a vision of that land which was to be given into the keeping of the Sons of Israel.

Then with the advance of day the spell was broken. With a shock, life and the workaday world, with all its problems, again intruded upon the girl's consciousness. Again all of her sorrow swept over her. Suddenly she realized that had not the dormant knowledge of Barrington's love been hers the morning would not have appeared so beautiful.

Slowly she rode down the narrow footpath. Her mind was beaten again by those thoughts which had been temporarily put to flight.

"Oh, God! Oh, God!" she thought wildly, "is my vow binding? Was not she who bore the Christ a mother? Is there a holier calling than that of mother and wifedom?"

Throughout the ride homeward and all the morning thereafter these questions cried out to the girl until she decided to go to Padre Galvez.

Clemencia's Crisis

Not in the guise of one who seeks absolution but as a friend who craves kindly advice. The decision quieted her throughout the day, and enabled her to meet and talk with her grandmother with her usual self-possession.





CHAPTER XXXVII

THAT afternoon Clemencia sought Padre Galvez at the mission house. She drove there in the little basket phaeton which was kept for her exclusive use.

The good padre was expecting her, for he was one who observed keenly, and of late he had noted many things. When the morning had gone by and Clemencia had failed to come to mass he had said to himself: "She is troubled." And the nature of her grief had not been difficult for him to guess.

The night before, at the fête, he had observed

Clemencia's Crisis

Clemencia and Barrington leave the pavilion together. Their prolonged absence from among the other guests he had also noted and he had watched their return. He had his own reasons for thus observing them; he felt that his responsibility toward the girl was more than that of an ordinary confessor.

It was soon after the noon hour when Clemencia arrived at the mission. She was ushered into the old padre's reception-room and, standing, awaited his arrival. Padre Galvez, entering the room unobserved, in silence watched her from the doorway. Then he took a step forward. Clemencia, hearing him, turned swiftly. She sank to her knees and cried out: "Help me, padre, for I have sinned exceedingly!"

The girl had not meant to tell him of her trouble in these words, but the priest had broken in upon her musings and unconsciously the words of the confessional had leaped to her lips.

A gentle smile swept over the face of the old padre. He crossed the room and stood beside the girl. Then he lifted her from the floor and assisted her to a seat, seating himself beside her. Rapidly Clemencia told him her story. She did

Clemencia's Crisis

not spare herself, and the padre did not interrupt her recital. When she ceased speaking he questioned her gravely, but there were no words of reproach.

At last the ordeal was over. It was Father Galvez who broke the deep silence which followed.

"My daughter," he said, "you have not sinned. Your soul is as white as are the souls of the peaceful nuns."

"But, padre, did I not swear an oath? Surely I have sinned in forgetting?"

"The love of man and woman is not sinful, my child."

"But — for me?"

"For you, too, daughter. You fight to dream the dreams of a nun while your rebellious heart beats refusal. The mistake that you make is that you see but one goal. You are striving to reach but one end. Child," and the voice of the old man grew strangely solemn, "there are more roads than one to heaven. If one for whom God has better use in the world enters holy life, actuated by false fervor, that one will find no comfort."

Clemencia's Crisis

"Yet — I have always felt that the convent was God's field for me! And surely it is the greatest of all fields in which to work!"

"To have sons and daughters is noble, too," answered the priest, and straightway asked: "What right have we to question or to say which is the greater field for us? God's ways are not our ways. Is the crown of thorns a more glorious consummation than the transfiguration?"

"But, padre, has not my stay in the convent already unfitted me for the world?"

"No, the human love you feel is peradventure God's way of telling you whether you should enter it again. There are many signs by which you should know your true vocation. I have seen no sign that you were really chosen to be a nun."

Then with a smile Father Galvez added: "It is not always necessary to seek heaven through martyrdom."

To Clemencia, as she listened, reason whispered: "Perhaps, after all, you have too narrowly interpreted the truth."

In his kindly voice the padre continued: "The vocation in the Catholic church comes as an imperative call; those to whom it calls cannot

Clemencia's Crisis

make a mistake. The martyrs heard its voice and gave up their lives, but not all of us were meant to be martyrs."

Clemencia felt that the whole world was rocking under her feet. What did it mean — this reasoning of the good padre? He only echoed the words which her lover had spoken! She stepped to the window. She felt stifled. The cold breath of air which came down from the mountains was like wine to her nostrils, and the sharp-edged ridges of the stony heights were bathed in their soft haze of amethyst. How penetrating, how life-giving the air seemed. Below in the garden she saw two cassocked monks walking to and fro. Her face was troubled and the priest, who was watching her, went on: "Mother church guards her souls well, but she does not guard them all alike. My vision is clearer than yours, child, but I feared that you would never realize this. I have long known your lover, Clemencia, and my faith in him calls me to champion his cause. He will not lower your standards. He will not separate you from your church. Only another of her sacraments will bind you to her, and in the world you will upbuild and glorify her."

Clemencia's Crisis

As the girl listened her face lightened. She felt as if a great load had been lifted from her heart, and she felt her rich blood flow freely again. Padre Galvez's words found echo in her heart. Was it possible that in her Valley of Renunciation she had stumbled into the sunlit trail of happiness? She turned and caught the hand of the priest.

"I am not alone, then, in this great world!" she cried. But suddenly a great fear leaped into her throat and she asked in a whisper: "Padre — my grandmother! What of her?"

The priest pressed his hand wearily to his forehead, but his eyes smiled confidently into hers.

"That will be your greatest trial — and mine, my child. But our kind mother, the church, will find a way even to convince the senora. You cannot turn back now! Be true to yourself!"

But even as she listened she gained strength to refute his conviction. The courage of the martyrs was hers.

Well she knew that she loved Arslan, but was love sufficient reason to deny her grandmother all happiness? Pale she faced the padre.

"I admit my love," she groaned in despair, "but I will never betray her trust."

Clemencia's Crisis

The padre argued long but to no purpose.

"Only *she* can release me," sighed Clemencia.

As the old priest seated her in her carriage he drew the dark serape about her shoulders, for the wind was chill, and he sighed deeply saying:

"Alas, you are wrong, my child, and I fear peace will never enter your heart."



CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE day following the fête Barrington kept to his room, anxiously hoping that Clemencia would relent and send for him. Brooding thus, the hours passed slowly for him. Late in the afternoon he wandered over to the Country Club, remembering that he had made an engagement to play bridge with Mr. Helton and two other friends. The game was well under way an hour later when Manual Sanchez came into the cardroom.

The Spaniard took a quick survey and then approached the players. He had been drinking, the fact of which was plainly evident. His cruel little black eyes showed venom as he greeted the members of Barrington's party.

The necessity of speaking to Sanchez was disagreeable to all of the men, but their nods of recognition were forcibly polite. Sanchez seated himself with a word of apology. But he soon made manifest that he was more interested in one

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of the players than in the game. Twice he addressed Barrington insolently, and though the latter returned cool replies it was evident that the Spaniard was bent upon mischief.

"You have American luck, lieutenant," he said during an interval in the play, "but don't forget that luck at cards means disaster in love."

Barrington endeavored to keep his temper. One or two further interruptions followed until at last the naval man's patience was exhausted.

"Senor Sanchez," he said finally, "your interest in our game may be sincere, but your interruptions would be more agreeable if they came later."

"I will speak when it pleases me, sir, and not at your dictation," answered the Spaniard angrily.

"Here! Here!" Mr. Helton broke in. "For heaven's sake, Sanchez, drop it! Leave us to play our game in peace."

But the Spaniard's eyes were filled with rage. "I speak only to Lieutenant Barrington," he persisted, "and I await his reply."

Barrington lifted his eyes to the Spaniard's face and answered calmly: "For the same reason, sir, I ask you to be more moderate in your language. It might be misinterpreted."

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Without warning Sanchez lurched forward.

"There can be no misinterpretation of this!" he almost shouted, raising his hand threateningly. But the blow never fell, for Barrington pushed back his chair and, springing to his feet, caught Sanchez by the throat. A mad, unreasoning fury possessed the American. For a moment the strength of a giant was his. As he stood gripping his enemy in a grasp of iron it seemed that Sanchez was doomed.

The controversy had come about so quickly that the three men at the table were for the moment paralyzed with amazement. Fortunately for Sanchez, their inaction was brief. Recovering themselves, they broke Barrington's hold on his foe, but not before the Spaniard had been choked almost breathless and had received a terrible beating.

It was several minutes before Sanchez breathed freely again, but the young officer regained composure almost immediately. He stood silent for a little space while Sanchez glared at him with cold fury. Then he said:

"I regret this occurrence more than I can express. I am your guest, Mr. Helton, and if in

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any way I can make reparation I shall be pleased to do so. But," and turning to Sanchez he added, "you, sir, did not get half that you deserve."

"This cannot end our quarrel, Lieutenant Barrington!" snarled the other.

"As you please. But will you have the goodness to choose a more fitting place for our next encounter?"

"Believe me," snarled Sanchez, "it will be a fitting place and the occasion as soon as I can make it."

"I am entirely at your service, sir."

"You shall hear from me," Sanchez finished. He strode out of the cardroom and a moment later Barrington and his companions saw the man's long, low automobile dash away down the road that ran toward the town.

Despite her determination to keep the vow made to her grandmother, Clemencia's heart was bowed with grief and bitterness, following her interview with the Padre Galvez. The fact that she was doing her duty was poor consolation to her stricken heart. She determined that she would speak to her grandmother and beg her to hasten her return to the convent.

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She was determined that she would not see Barrington again. Indeed, she felt that she dared not trust herself with him.

However, fired as she was with the belief that she had renounced happiness forever, it was with a feeling of relief that Clemencia received a message that the senora was indisposed and had taken to her bed with a severe headache.

Clemencia sought the *patio* and sank down into one of the soft chairs. She was utterly weary in body and soul. It was there, in the violet dusk of a California evening, that Manuel Sanchez found her two hours after he had left the Country Club.

"Clemencia, I have been called suddenly away and must leave for San Francisco early tomorrow morning. I have come to ask you to accompany me on the ride you promised."

"Not tonight," said Clemencia; "I am too tired."

"Sweet cousin, I leave tomorrow. Besides," he added suavely, "a horseback ride will rest your nerves."

Though she knew he spoke the truth, Clemencia demurred.

"Another time would suit me better," she

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began, but Manuel broke in with: "But I have something of great importance to tell you. It will not wait."

"To what purpose are our talks?" answered the girl.

"Clemencia," he began persuasively, "your conscience may be at rest tonight, for I have promised that I shall not discuss the forbidden topic of my love for you."

Noting that she still hesitated, he added: "A promise is a promise, cousin. The horses already await us."

Reluctantly the girl stood, but again she hesitated.

"Grandmamma is asleep. How shall I tell her?" she asked.

"Tell her not at all," he answered quickly.

"But I never go out without asking her consent. She would worry."

"What, in her sleep?" he laughed. "Spare her the knowledge, Clemencia — this time she cannot worry."

CHAPTER XXXIX

UNDER her cousin's importunity, Clemencia yielded and went to her room to don her riding clothes. When she returned a few minutes later they silently left the house and walked to the spot where Manuel had left the horses. As he assisted the girl to mount Sanchez smiled broadly.

"I am happy that you go with me," he said.

"Where shall we ride?" she asked abruptly.

"I know of a short cut to the range — shall we try that?" he questioned.

"Lead, I will follow," Clemencia answered.

Out through the moonlight they rode, while Clemencia, with a sigh, became absorbed in her own thoughts. For a time neither spoke. Having persuaded Clemencia to accompany him, Sanchez seemed to be content. He led the way along the narrow path that he had chosen. The flickering light of the moon marked queer patterns on the ground.

Presently where the path crossed a clearing it

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grew wider. Clemencia rode alongside her companion, but, wrapped in her own thoughts, she paid no heed to him as he half turned and gazed upon her with the fire of desire in his eyes, a fire that burned more brightly, perhaps, because she upon whom it was focused had always been so unattainable. But tonight one observing closely might have caught a gleam of triumph in the glance.

Clemencia roused herself to find Manuel's gaze upon her. "What a girl you are, Clemencia! With all your wisdom you are but a girl!" he laughed in answer to her look.

"What was the important thing you wished to tell me?" she asked shortly.

"Oh, there is a certain spot upon which my fancy has fixed, and it is there, and there only, that I dare divulge my secret," replied Sanchez gayly.

"How mysterious you are tonight," she answered, gazing at him in surprise. "I have never seen you in this temper before, Sir Knight of the Cloaked Moods," she added, trying to meet his jesting mood.

"I have reached the turning point in my life," the other declared oracularly.

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"May it inspire you to great deeds!" she answered.

"I am planning the greatest of them all," he declared subtly.

"Manuel," she said, and halted her horse, "we really ought to turn back."

"Just a little beyond," he urged playfully. "We are very near now!"

"But we have gone too far already."

"All right," he said, "we will dismount here, and while the horses rest I will show you the wonderful spot which I have chosen to be the scene of my disclosure."

Clemencia slipped to the ground and walked in short turns while Manuel tethered the horses. When he rejoined her she had paused in a patch of moonlight.

"Is this not enchanting?" he began, and, truth to tell, the scene about them was wonderfully beautiful.

The man and girl stood on a little knoll overlooking a narrow valley. A few yards toward the valley, and to the right of the trail along which they had ridden, was perched a little log cabin which the silvery light of the moon, filtering

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between the wide branches of the trees, had transformed into a veritable gnome palace.

The thick masses of spruce and pine, the sweep of rising slopes, as they lifted toward the distant peaks, the tiny white waterfall which leaped foaming over a fir-framed cliff and then danced twinkling away — all these steeped in the mellow moonlight made thought of fairyland not preposterous.

The girl was thrilled by the beauty about her.

"How wonderful it is!" she exclaimed breathlessly.

"Then we must often come here together," he said slowly.

"It is strange that in all my rides I have never discovered this spot," she said in a low voice.

"And never would," answered her cousin gayly. "It is my find — quite off the beaten track, too!"

"And now for the mysterious disclosure!" exclaimed Clemencia, who for all her interest in the scene still remembered that she must return home soon.

"It is in the cabin that the secret must be told," he said, leading the way down toward the hut.

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He threw open the door and led the way inside. Striking a match he lit a lamp, swinging from the ceiling, and stood aside to let her pass. The cabin was rudely furnished with a table and a cot, but there were no signs of recent occupancy. Only a heavy quilt was thrown over the cot, and dust lay thick on the table.

"Why should one build out here?" she said, looking curiously about her.

"Simply to be alone with nature, I suppose," he answered. Seemingly forgetting the mission upon which they had come to the cabin, she turned to go.

"Wait a moment, Clemencia," said her companion hastily. "In the quiet — solemn quiet — of this hut I wish you to hear what I have to say."

"Oh, yes, I remember! But how dramatic! Does it make the secret more important, telling it here?" answered the girl.

"The surrounding will impress it better upon your memory," he replied dryly.

"Well, hurry," she said. "My curiosity is aroused."

Sanchez gazed upon her in silence, as if afraid to begin speaking. Now that he had brought her

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to this secluded spot her unsuspecting inner sense robbed him of words.

"Well, Manuel," a little impatiently, "I am waiting."

He nerved himself. "Clemencia, what I have to say may not be agreeable to you. Have you thought of that?"

She was startled and answered hastily: "But you promised to be pleasant."

Sanchez leaned across the little table at which they had seated themselves. "I watched you last night dancing with Lieutenant Barrington, and it seems to me that your interest in him decidedly unfits you for the veil."

Clemencia seemed thunderstruck by his words.

"How dare you say that to me!" she blazed at him.

"Surely you need not ask," he answered. His voice held an insinuating tone.

She spoke furiously: "You have no right to talk to me in this manner!" The girl faced her cousin in astonishment and wrath. His manner was new to her. The words, of course, were nothing, but the tone in which they were uttered carried a thinly veiled insult. Vaguely she under-

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stood that Manuel sought to call her to account, and she resented the attempt. Her eyes grew cold and hard.

"Be careful, Manuel; there are limits to my patience," warned Clemencia.

The man was unabashed, and an insolent look had leaped into his eyes as he spoke. Suddenly she felt a chill. The expression made her shudder.

Never before had Clemencia feared her cousin, but something very like fear clutched her throat. She essayed calmness and said: "Come, Manuel, we are not children to stand here quarreling. The hour is late and we must return."

"Not so fast, my pretty cousin. I have not half finished what I came to say."

The girl turned toward the door, but he barred the way. Crimson color flooded Clemencia's cheeks. That he had attempted to call her to account seemed bad enough; that he should seek to dictate to her was to the girl almost inconceivable, but she saw that he was greatly excited.

"I must temporize with him," she thought swiftly, and said: "The moon is high, Manuel. I wish to go home."

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"And I say you shall not!" he replied, his voice carrying a note of menacing authority. There was no mistaking his tone now. Her heart seemed suddenly wrapped in ice.

"Are you insane?" she asked, her voice shaking with terror.

"Mad with love for you!" he exclaimed passionately.

Then she knew that she was not mistaken. It was evil that she had seen in his eye. Strangely enough, the knowledge made her less afraid. She understood now how she must deal with him. It must be with cold contempt; that had always brought him to his senses.

"Well, my chivalrous and courtly cousin," she said, "do you not think we can talk better in the open? It is stifling in here."

Her words were edged.

For a moment Sanchez was misled by her apparent calm; nor did he at once catch her sarcasm. Her manner cooled his ardor. He was nonplussed, but with the movement she made toward the door his insolence returned. With an ugly laugh he said: "I prefer to talk to you in the seclusion of this cabin."

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Instinct warned her to ignore his threats. She must not let him know her terror.

"How strangely you talk!" she said, maintaining her enforced calm. "Why should I want to escape you, my cousin, my protector?"

"Drop that! I have forgotten both of those rôles tonight!" he snarled.

Praying that he would not hear the beating of her heart, she replied: "Well, if you prefer we will talk here."

"That is better," he growled.





CHAPTER XL

“WELL,” she began nonchalantly, “be quick, for I shall not stay here much longer.” Her words and manner were ill chosen and stung the man to fury.

He glared at her angrily, exclaiming: “That is just what you will do! You will stay here until morning!”

Clemencia came of a spirited race and anger ran riot in her as she listened to this base threat. She leaped to her feet, in a storm of rebellion.

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"How dare you menace me?" she said.

Sanchez stood, also. He held out his hands in expostulatory gesture, as if he would calm her, but his small, black eyes glittered with a horrible light as he said:

"You are in my power." He stepped forward swiftly and gripped both of her arms. Clemencia's face was like marble as she listened to his terrible words. She tried to shake off his grip. "You coward, you lied to bring me here."

"I would do more than lie to win you."

Suddenly the man clutched her to his breast and gazed greedily down upon her, his eyes hot with passion. She nerved herself to reason with him again, while she fought to be free.

"Manuel, have you weighed the risk of detaining me? My grandmother's wrath, should she learn of this, will be visited upon you in a terrible fashion."

"I have thought of that, but after tonight she will be glad to consent to our marriage: she is proud, you know." He laughed harshly.

Clemencia cried out in rage: "Does my hate count for nothing?"

"I fear neither God, man, nor the devil to-

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night, with you in my arms!" He leaned down to kiss her. She screamed aloud twice.

Swiftly Sanchez slipped his hand over her mouth. She jerked it away and again sent her voice through the quiet night.

Suddenly a great new strength seemed to be hers. She began fighting the man like a tigress. After a short, sharp struggle she managed to free herself. Sanchez, taken completely by surprise at the girl's furious onslaught, had fallen back under the quick rain of her blows.

Clemencia was no weakling. The blows with which she struck her cousin were not light ones.

For a time Sanchez was too taken aback to offer resistance, but after Clemencia had struck him several times stingingly in the face he reached out and grasped her arms with a grip of iron just above her elbows. Then again he crushed her to his breast, where she lay panting and helpless.

"What claws you have. When will you learn wisdom?"

Outside they heard the sound of running feet. Sanchez lifted his head and listened. He was fronting the one curtainless window of the cabin. What he saw framed therein caused his face to

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grow gray. His arms fell limply from about the girl and in a flash Clemencia had darted out through the open door. She ran swiftly toward the spot where they had left the horses. In her excitement she did not pause to note the cause of her deliverance. That help had come was enough for her.

Clemencia a moment later flung herself into the saddle and urged her horse homeward at a swift gallop. It was not until she was well on her way that she took time to feel surprise that she had not been followed.

The swift animal soon bore her to the safety of the ranch. She slid from the horse's back, slapped its hind quarters to start it on its way home, and hurried into the house.



CHAPTER XLI

SENORA CASTELLANOS awakened early the next morning, yet almost before she had finished her small cup of black coffee with which she invariably began the day she was surprised by a visit from Padre Galvez. As early as the hour was, the priest had found it difficult to wait even so long. He had spent a restless night, during which he decided that upon him devolved the task of convincing the senora that in holding her grand-

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daughter to the letter of the childish vow she was committing a sin.

The old priest was gentle by nature, but in that interview no one would have suspected it.

The senora was quite unnerved by what he said to her. He expressed his thought plainly and he did not mince words. The time had come, he felt, when Clemencia's life's happiness was at stake, and he had determined that the senora's narrow view of life should not wreck her granddaughter's happiness.

Long these two old people talked together, and the battle between them was a terrible one, for though the Padre Galvez was an old man he was fighting under the banner of youth, and the battle between youth and age is always terrible.

It is such an unequal contest! Old age is always so helpless!

The senora received her guest on the wide veranda of her home. Clemencia, who under the strain and excitement of the night before had lain long awake, had not yet arisen.

The padre and his hostess were seated in a corner of the long, deeply shaded porch.

Father Galvez, after the first greetings, plunged

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almost immediately into the middle of his subject. His assurance that he spoke with the delegated voice of God gave him courage.

"You will blacken your soul forever if you hold Clemencia to her promise, and if you do not release her she will send her lover away and keep her oath to you. Look to yourself that you do not crush the daughter as you did the mother by your unholy interference."

Cruel though the words of the priest seemed, he felt that nothing less than rank cruelty would draw the veil of error from before the eyes of the old woman to whom he talked.

Senora Castellanos, though she fought hard, realized the truth of the priest's words and was crushed by them. For weeks she had faced the inevitable, and though her heart was rent by the breaking up of all her well-laid plans her masterful spirit recognized defeat. For days the torture of uncertainty had been hers. Had she not witnessed the life's happiness of Clemencia's mother wrecked by one of these same Americans? She trembled at the priest's denunciations.

The priest read the woman's mind and he hastened to take advantage of her indecision.

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"See that you make amends to the daughter for the injustice to the mother," he said. The words were brutal, but the tone was kindly. And so the outcome of it all was that when the senora arose to bid Father Galvez good-bye she had been conquered.

"The very demons themselves are set against me, I think," she said wearily, "and though I know it is enchantment that has won Clemencia from my cherished hopes I will release her from her vow."

To the padre the senora was more terrible in her sudden meekness than she had ever been in her implacable determination. Gazing upon her saddened face his eyes grew misty and he said gently:

"Oh, my daughter, though your soul is troubled now with the sacrifice you are making, your recompense will be greater than you guess."

To this Senora Castellanos answered suddenly, with all her old proud bitterness of manner: "When I have talked with Clemencia send Lieutenant Barrington to me."

CHAPTER XLII

AN hour later Clemencia answered her grandmother's summons. Her experience of the night before had been a terrible one. She bore the marks of the strain in her white face. She had determined to open her heart to her grandmother and to tell her the story not only of Sanchez but of her struggles against the love that had come to her for Barrington.

Then she would tell her grandmother that she was still prepared to abide by the elder woman's decision. She would send Arslan Barrington away and take the veil in accordance with the terms of her vow. But the elder woman's agitation, plainly manifest, was disconcerting to the girl, and for the moment she thought it best to keep her counsel. Of late her grandmother had worn a strained look that had caused Clemencia to wonder occasionally if that strong virility was lessening.

This thought touched Clemencia with sadness,

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for with all the elder woman's asperity of manner, her sternness and her cynicism, the girl knew that she, Clemencia, was her dearest thought in life. Their natures were so dissimilar that any show of affection between them was rare, but Clemencia appreciated the great affection — though mistaken in its plans for her — that had ruled the senora.

She had, too, a tenderness toward the proud and weary old soul that was suffering in its last days of loneliness, shutting itself off in seclusion and holding aloof from the world that would have softened and given moments of forgetfulness, if not continued peace. *

The senora was seated in the same chair from which she had talked to Father Galvez and the girl sat before her on the wide railing of the porch.

"Clemencia," began the elder woman, "the padre has been with me and he crucified my heart with his words. But that hour has passed."

Briefly the senora told her granddaughter that she had wished to hear Clemencia's story and then added: "I have not the strength to hear it now." She told the girl of her interview with Padre Galvez. In closing her talk she said: "My beloved, the good padre tells me that I have

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been cruel to you — you who are dearer to me than anything else in the world. I thought I was acting for the best, but, alas, I see differently now, and all my plans have gone astray. No one can live another's life. You are free from your vow to me."

Speechless with happiness Clemencia slid from her seat on the porch railing. She bent swiftly down and kissed her grandmother with a tenderness that had in it something of sorrow. The girl realized that her grandmother in absolving her from her vow was relinquishing a dearest hope.

The senora passed her hand lovingly across the girl's hair. "And now leave me, my child, for I feel sadly the need of rest."

Public interest was still at fever heat concerning the power-house murders when the newspapers came out with the declaration that the name of the real culprit, "the man higher up," would be revealed in a short time as the result of important discoveries recently made by detectives working on the case. According to the accounts, the guilty man was a member of the inmost exclusive circle of Santa Barbara society. The accounts pointed

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out that success in tracking down the criminal might be attributed to Mr. Helton, who had spared neither money or personal effort toward gaining the end sought.

The published accounts had keyed local interest up to the highest point and the whole town awaited developments with bated expectancy.

These power-house murders had deeply stirred quiet Santa Barbara. That in the midst of the peaceful town terrible death should be dealt out — these horrible deaths for no apparent reason — had terrorized the good citizens who naturally placed blame on the strikers, whom they believed took this means of retaliation.

But there were certain phases of the case which had been at first absolutely baffling to those who sought to clear up the mystery.

The diabolical ingenuity with which the trap had been set showed that he who was responsible for the crime possessed, at least, a working knowledge of electricity.

Each of the oiling stands had been connected with the turbine by wires secreted under the floor. These wires had been governed by a time clock placed in the alleyway which ran the length of the

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power-house on one side. The cunning manner in which the arrangement had been made had puzzled detectives even after the warnings had been issued.

Publication of the details of the scheme following their disclosure had aroused anger in the quiet little city.

Early one morning on the day after the newspapers had made their sensational declarations Mr. Helton called at Barrington's rooms before the latter had risen for the day. Helton aroused his friend from sleep and waited while the naval man was at his bath.

When Barrington appeared ready to receive his guest Helton said: "Barrington, the guilty man in the short-circuit case has been identified. I have facts in my possession which will enable me to have him arrested today. My God, you would never guess who it is!"

"I am heartily glad," answered Barrington. Then an expression on Helton's face caused the young officer to add: "Surely you are not hesitating to publish the criminal!"

"Yes, exactly that," said Helton.

"Who is the guilty man?" cried Barrington.

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"Manuel Sanchez!"

"My God!" exclaimed Barrington. Helton began speaking swiftly to his friend. "I wish you to accompany me to Senor Sanchez's rooms that we may make it possible for him to be quietly arrested and removed from the city under guard to avoid mob violence."

"Personally I am not favorably impressed by Senor Sanchez. Of this you are well aware."

"No more am I. However, I thought for Clemencia's sake and for the sake of Senora Castellanos we would give him a chance. If he is arrested today with those poor fellows scarcely cold in their graves it will go hard with him," exclaimed Helton.

"A rope or a bullet would probably be his reward," answered Barrington.

"Yes, the people are at white heat; they would not stop to reason. A maddened crowd usually hangs a man first and gives him a trial afterward."

"But you say the men are here for his arrest?" asked Barrington.

"Yes, but we could evade them. I have done so much toward tracing the man that the police would never suspect me of leniency. This will

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allow me time to warn him and give him time to get away from Santa Barbara."

"You will send him under guard, I suppose?"

"Certainly, but I want you to accompany me to his room and be with me when I offer him his chance. Won't you come with me?"

"But our quarrel — our mutual dislike, these would make me an unwelcome guest," answered Barrington.

"Even so, are we not doing the man a good turn in giving him a chance to defend himself?"

After brief parley Barrington consented to go with Mr. Helton. They walked swiftly toward the Spaniard's home.

Barrington's consideration of Helton's revelations to him was made with the knowledge of these things in his mind. He also knew that Manuel Sanchez, as well as the senora, was heavily interested in the power-house property. Consequently he was the more mystified as to what purpose could have actuated the Spaniard.

It took the two men but a short time to reach Sanchez's rooms. From the Spaniard's valet the two visitors learned that his master had not been at home since the day before.

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Helton and Barrington called at once at Sanchez's office. They only found Miss Morro there. She appeared pale but composed.

Almost as soon as Barrington and his friend entered the room she rose from her seat at the desk and asked: "Have you come to inquire about the discrepancies in Senor Sanchez's accounts with the senora?"

The two men were amazed and answered in the negative. They learned from the girl that on the evening before, the Senora Castellanos had quite accidentally discovered a heavy deficit in her accounts.

After listening to the girl's story Barrington turned to Mr. Helton and said: "Pardon me, Mr. Helton, but I would like to speak alone to this young woman."

"Certainly," answered the other. Helton went into an adjoining office and closed the door behind him.

As soon as they were alone Barrington began speaking to the girl: "Miss Morro, the deficit in the senora's accounts was known to you before, and I now know you referred to them when you spoke of your employer's guilt to me."

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The girl did not reply.

Barrington waited for a moment and then, seeing that she did not intend answering, he went on: "Is this the only transaction of which you have knowledge?"

"Yes," she stammered.

"There is nothing else?"

"Nothing else," she answered defiantly.

"You feared nothing else?" Sanchez's secretary gazed at Barrington with frightened eyes, but she did not speak. He waited a moment and said: "Will you compel me to tell what has passed between us or will you reveal all you know?"

"I have nothing to tell," she said sullenly.

"Senorita, did your threat to betray Senor Sanchez involve no other crime?"

"Why do you ask me such questions?" said the girl.

"You know everything!" Barrington said sternly, as he suddenly leaned close to her. "You even know where Sanchez is hiding."

"Senor Barrington," she stammered, her agitation betraying her alarm.

"Come, Miss Morro, you know where he is hidden! You will have to tell us!"

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But despite his firm belief that she knew all, Barrington got no satisfaction from his interview with Miss Morro, and he was soon convinced that he would have to employ unusual tactics to ascertain the truth from her.

A moment later Barrington and the girl rejoined Mr. Helton, and the two men left Sanchez's office almost immediately.

The young officer said nothing to his friend concerning his suspicions of Miss Morro's guilty knowledge of Sanchez's criminal activity. He was not sure of his ground and he knew it was never wise to voice suspicion when it is not backed by facts.

CHAPTER XLIII

DESPITE the fact that the Senora Castellanos had lost heavily through the dishonesty of Sanchez she offered a large reward for his safe return. Though she had learned of his baseness toward Clemencia and was angered beyond measure, she found that blood spoke with an importunate voice. Whatever his crime against her had been she felt that she could settle with him later. That there would be a grim reckoning with the derelict the old woman promised herself firmly. However, just now her first endeavor was to find Sanchez. Of course, she was not aware that he was guilty of the more serious crime of murder.

Immediate search was instituted for the missing man. It was learned that he had not been seen by his usual companions after he left the country club following his altercation with Lieutenant Barrington.

At first Barrington felt uneasiness because of

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his trouble with the missing man, but this passed away as he was easily able to account for his movements after leaving the club, from where he had gone directly home and to bed.

Of course, Clemencia and her grandmother knew of the ride, but the senora forbade the girl to tell of it until every other clew had been run down.

Two days went by, during which no trace of Sanchez was uncovered. On the evening of the second day the senora reached the decision to permit Clemencia to tell of her harrowing experience in the secluded cabin.

The old woman, with Clemencia, was preparing to visit Santa Barbara's police headquarters for an interview with the chief when a servant announced the arrival of Miss Morro on an important mission.

The senora went down into the drawing-room, where the unfortunate girl awaited her.

Between wild sobs the girl told the Senora Castellanos that she loved Manuel Sanchez better than she did her own life. She also revealed other important facts to the old Spanish woman, who listened in horrified wonder to the confession.

Clemencia's Crisis

It had been Miss Morro, according to her story, who had been the means of Clemencia's deliverance from the cabin in the woods. According to the girl's story, also, on that evening she had suspected that her lover was going out with his cousin, and, driven by jealous rage, she had followed them on horseback, keeping far enough away to escape detection. Then through the cabin window she had watched their struggle. Manuel, facing the window, had glimpsed her after she made some slight noise to attract his glance. Miss Morro said that when Clemencia ran out of the cabin she had faced her lover, telling him the time had come for their marriage and that she would no longer wait.

"Then he laughed in my face," she sobbed, "and in fury I stabbed him twice. But when he fell I prayed God not to let him die. For two days I have nursed him, but this morning he does not know me. I am so frightened, and, oh, senora, will he die?"

A rescue party was sent out at once and Sanchez was brought to the home of his relative, after she had made a solemn promise that she would be responsible for his safe keeping. The old woman

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almost succumbed to the shock when she learned that he, in addition to his crime against her, was suspected of murder.

It was many weeks before Sanchez was well again — weeks before he could be brought to trial for his misdeeds. When the time came, however, the trial was the sensation of the hour. He was acquitted on the testimony of Miss Morro. It proved him to have been only the tool of the “men higher up” in the most rascally deal ever perpetrated anywhere. But though Sanchez missed the penitentiary his days for doing evil were over. The stab wound had paralyzed one side and rendered it useless forever.

In court Miss Morro had laid stress on the fact that every time the deadly deeds were planned she, at Sanchez's orders, wrote the notes which saved the men at the power-house. This gained his acquittal. But Barrington suspected that she swore falsely to save the man she loved. He believed that she herself had prevented the murders without orders from him. But she was able to prove that the short-circuit crime which had resulted in the death of the three men was not done at his command and that therefore he was

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not responsible for those which followed. In fact, she testified that only his will had prevented the murder from occurring before it did.

When he was finally acquitted, that most faithful of women took charge of the now helpless man and when later he married her she declared herself the happiest of women.

The sunlight was flooding the world when Senora Castellanos sent for Lieutenant Barrington, but the shadows were beginning to creep over the sublime wilderness of mountains before their conversation ended. Their talk can only be guessed, for always afterward the two were strangely silent concerning it. But in the solemn splendor of that amber-shaded room the Spanish woman must have heard the secrets of the young man's heart, and the struggle that Clemencia made to keep her vow, for later she said to the padre:

"The silent force of nature is a wonderful thing, and the awakening of a soul marvelous. In the silence of the mountains under the starlit sky or in the midst of heated argument the soul hears a call and then there is no evading its magic. It convinces all at once. A magnet that baffles the world to explain drew them together."

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The older woman's face was white and drawn when she sent for her granddaughter, but she never faltered in what she had to do. Clemencia alone guessed the depth of her feelings as she felt her grandmother's cold lips against her forehead and saw her tremble when she left the room.

Alone, Barrington and Clemencia faced each other. Storm and rain, whirlwind and fire held themselves in leash as they looked into each other's eyes. He moved toward her slowly and opened his arms. She trembled from head to foot, but she spoke first, and there was anguish in her voice:

"Oh, I am a very wicked woman," she sobbed passionately, "because I know now my heart cries out for you."

His face was illumined by her words. "Beloved, dare you, then, any longer deny me entrance to it?"

"Can I take my happiness at the expense of hers?"

Sternly he replied: "You are tenacious beyond belief in this pretense of duty. There should be no room in your heart for doubt."

"Either way my heart is crucified."

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"Not so," he continued quickly. "There is but one road for us, and we will travel it together."

"Why do you press me so hard?" she gasped.

"Because you would cheat us both. Too much lies between us now for you to hesitate."

Still she struggled to fight him off. "Would not memory kill us both?"

The moment was too strenuous. He would not spare her. She must bear it with him.

"I will never resign my rights," he said determinedly.

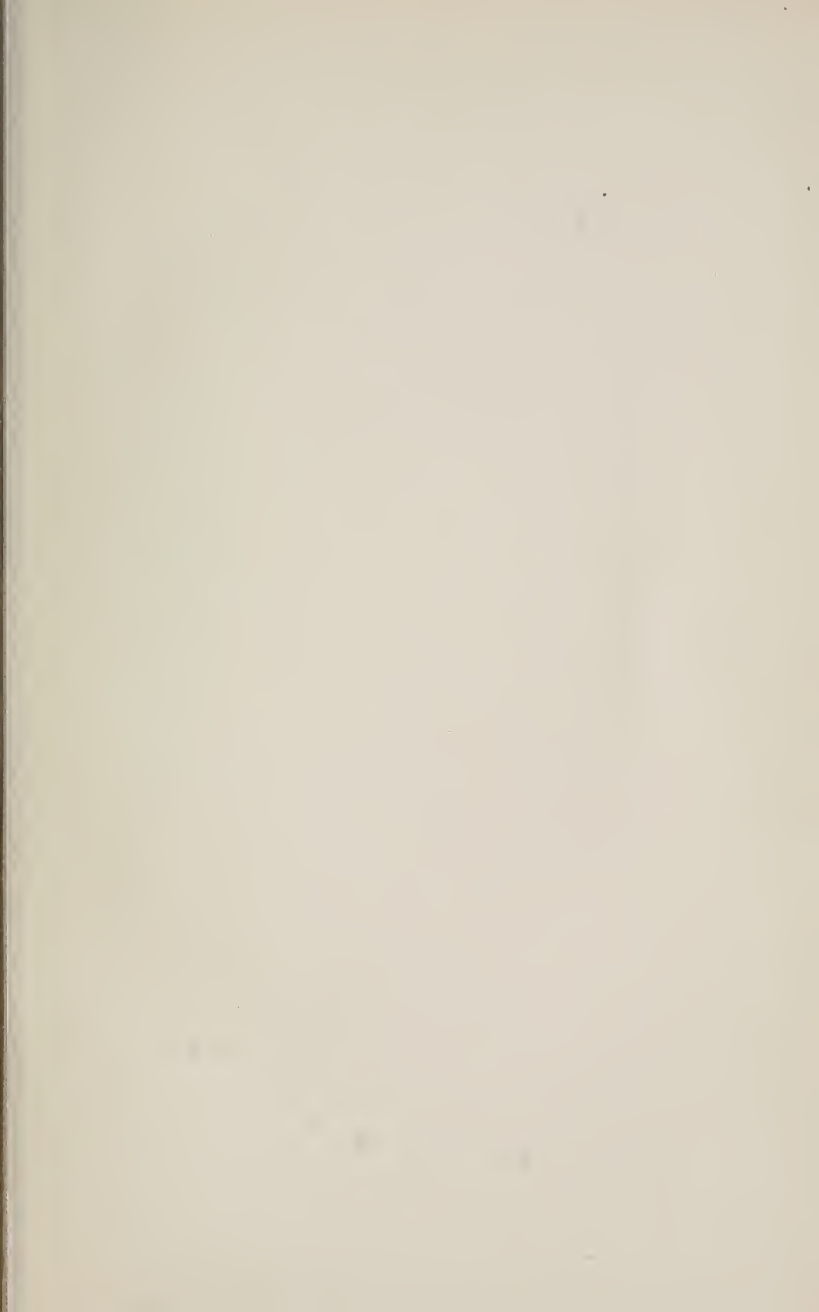
She clenched her hands in her agitation. "Will God forgive me?"

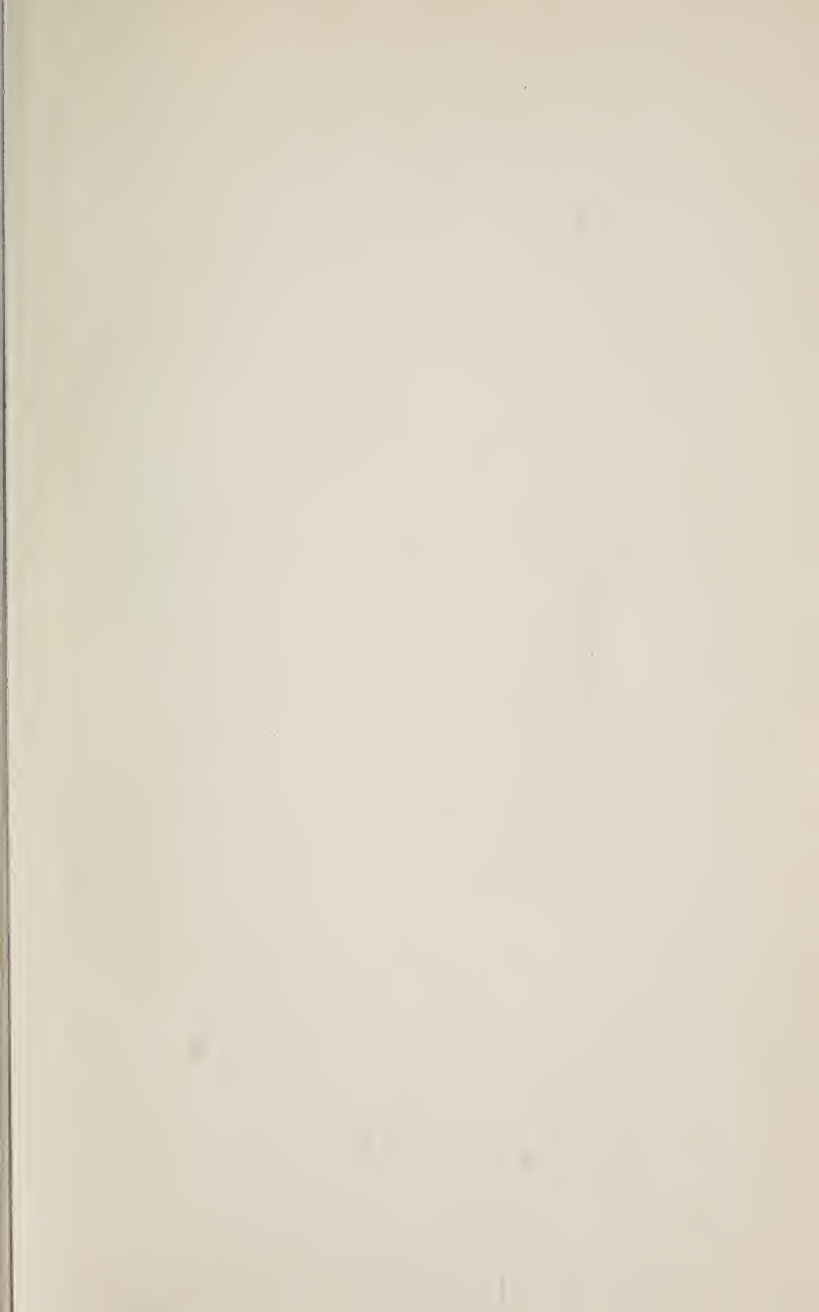
Volcanoes, fire, storm were under their feet, but they trod them breast to breast, as he whispered softly:

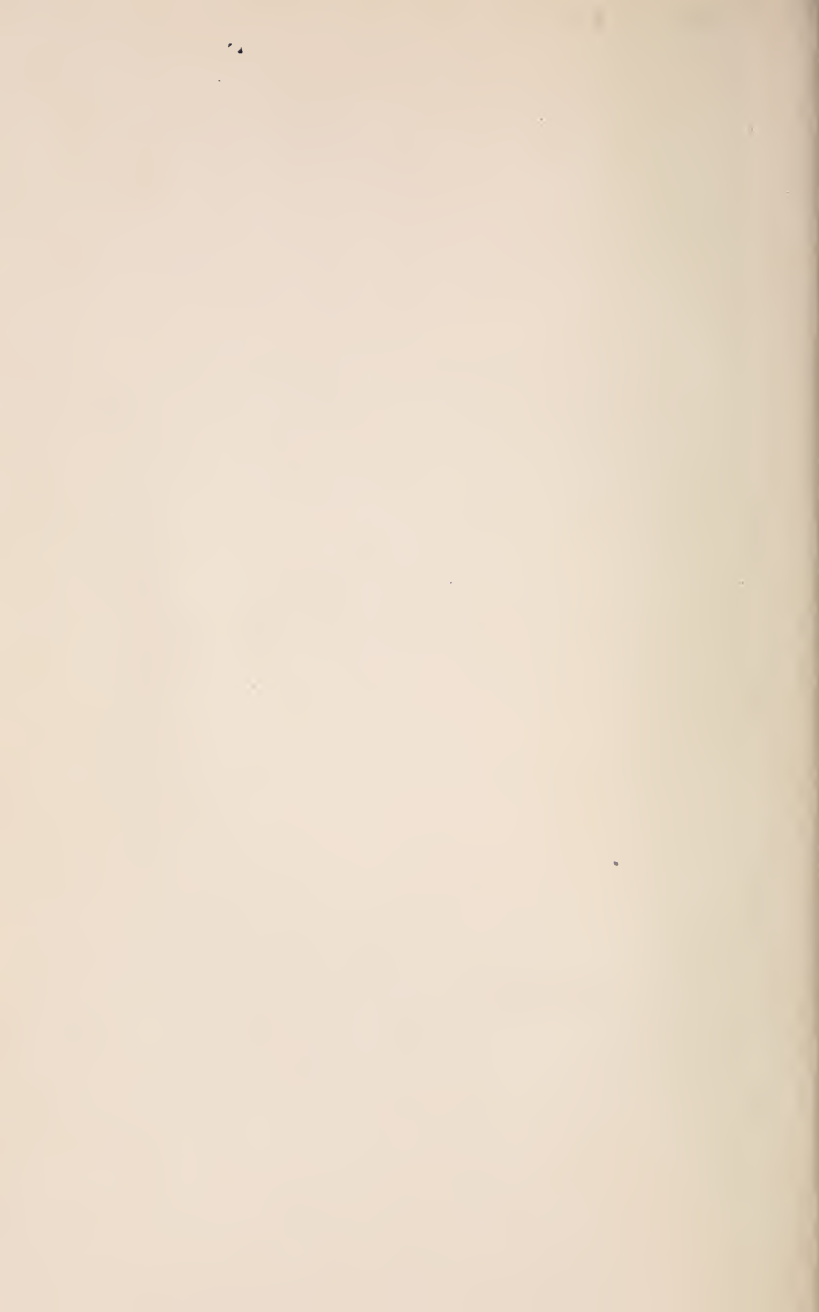
"He has nothing to forgive. He put love into your bosom to drown everything else," and caught her to his heart.

THE END









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